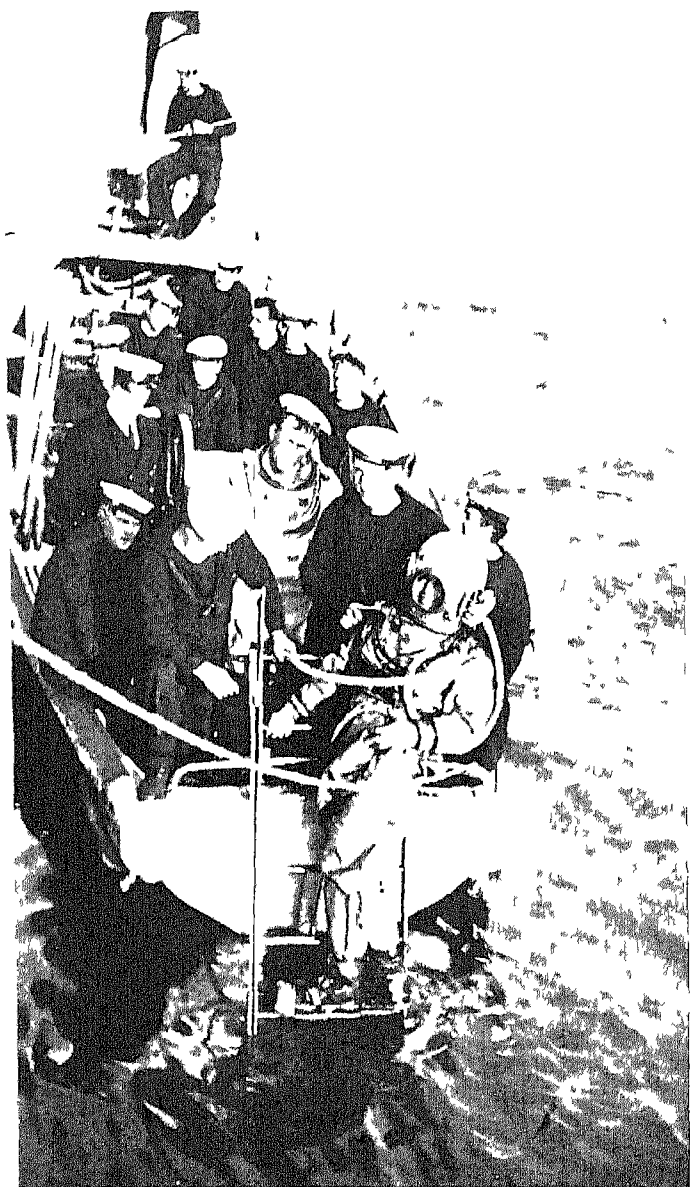




## TWENTY YEARS UNDER THE OCEAN



THE AUTHOR ABOUT TO DESCEND

# TWENTY YEARS UNDER THE OCEAN

*By*  
HENRY J. BRUCE

*With a Foreword by*  
ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET  
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT is not, I find, the easiest thing in the world to look back over one's life, especially when it has been such an eventful one as mine has been, and to remember each outstanding incident in its chronological order, together with the exact time and place of the happening.

Furthermore, it is, I imagine, a more difficult task for the sailor than for other people, for the simple reason that the confinement and routine of shipboard life seldom allow of any 'landmarks' by which the incident can be accurately placed.

For this reason I hope that any reader who may discover some discrepancy as regards date and place concerning any of the incidents I have described herein will overlook the not unnatural mistake.

This applies also to the spelling of place and other proper names, at which sailors are notoriously always bad !

H. J. B.



## FOREWORD

WHEN my old shipmate Henry Bruce sought me out the other day and asked me to contribute a foreword to his book of naval reminiscences, I was very pleased to accede to his request for several reasons.

First, because whether admirals or petty officers, shipmates are shipmates all the world over, and all the more so when they have been through such stirring times together as have the author of this book and myself. For Bruce served under me in the *Centaur* and the *Curaçoa* during the dark days of the War, when danger was our bed-fellow, and death hung over us all. And if any word from me will help at all to popularize his written record of stirring experiences and adventures in the Navy, then I am only too happy to give it.

And secondly because any record of naval life, written by a good and conscientious seaman, such as is the author of this one, must necessarily add to the glory and credit of the British Navy, so dear to the hearts not only of all good sailors, but of all true Britons. And also because I sometimes feel that, in the face of the vast number of literary reverberations from the fields of Flanders, the work of the Navy during the War tends to be overlooked by the public to-day, and such works as this one may tend to adjust this.

But mainly because such works as this may serve



to draw the attention of the rising generation of to-day to the possibilities of an enjoyable, adventurous and honourable career in His Majesty's Navy—the Navy which has always been the principal defence and stand-by of our island nation, and which, despite mechanical progress and the so-called 'conquest of the air,' will, I believe, always remain so.

Should this simple, honest record of naval life attract but one recruit to the brave flutter of the white ensign, then it will have justified its existence; but I join with the author in hoping that it will do far more than this to stimulate recruiting, which, in troublous and uncertain times such as these, is so essential to our honour and welfare as a nation. In which hope and belief I wish the best of good luck to ex-C.P.O. Bruce and his book.

*Ry Fawcett*

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

I WAS born at Oxford on 19 November, 1889, being the first begotten son of Walter Joseph Bruce and his wife, Mary Ann Bruce. The house in which I was born bore the somewhat curious address of 8½ George Street, St. Clement's, Oxford; but later we moved to another house at 2 Glebe Street, but still in the parish of St. Clement's.

My first recollections are, I think, concerned almost entirely with religious matters. At a very early age I can remember my mother reading frequently out of the Bible to me. This, I suppose, was done with the idea of familiarizing me as early as possible with the characters and stories of the Bible, but if so it was something of a failure, because my infantile mind was not sufficiently developed to understand the meaning of half the words I heard, or the significance of most of the incidents. I used to give most of those that I did vaguely understand a modern significance. I quite thought that that sort of thing still went on in the world. Thus I always was scared when passing through a wood in case I should see some young man like Absalom, dangling from a branch by his hair, and I always avoided bald-headed men like the plague, feeling convinced that where a bald-headed man was there were certain to be bears in the vicinity, ready and waiting to devour rude or unwary little boys!

My parents were both very devout people. I recall them referred to as 'practical Christians,' and this appeals to me as a very good description, because their religion took the very practical form of 'faith healing.'

Little was known in those days of what is now called Christian Science, and so far as I know my father and mother belonged to no denomination. To-day they would doubtless be Christian Scientists.

As it was they were sort of religious free-lances (or perhaps 'free-lance Christians' would be a better term), and they would attend divine service from time to time at all sorts of places of worship, irrespective of denomination or sect. Sometimes my father would preach, or testify, or 'lead in prayer' according to the ritual favoured by the particular church he was visiting at the time. But always, I think, the subject was the same, the miraculous powers of healing vouchsafed by the Lord to certain of His chosen people, who were possessed of sufficient faith to enable them to carry on such work successfully.

But more often my parents would conduct services in our own home, which were known as 'cottage meetings,' and of these I shall have more to say anon.

I have heard in my time many arguments about 'faith-healing' and the 'laying of the hands,' some for and some against it. My own opinion, based on the practical demonstrations of the 'art' which I have personally witnessed, is that faith cures can most certainly be effected, but that the individual who hopes to bring them about must not only possess infinite faith himself, but must also be capable of inspiring (for the moment, at any rate) a similar faith in the patient.

In this matter of practical faith-healing my mother was undoubtedly the stronger vessel. I remember an occasion when a small girl, visiting our house, tipped a kettle of boiling water over and badly scalded one of her legs.

Of course the kiddie yelled blue murder, and her mother got into a tremendous flurry, calling for oil, flour, and what-not to apply to the injury.

But my mother, without haste, and with a curious dignity of her own, which seemed to come to her at such moments, waved the woman aside, pushed the child into a chair, and then, dropping on her knees beside her, laid her hands on the already red and inflamed flesh, and bent her head slightly.

I knew that she was offering up a silent prayer, and I kept my eyes fixed on the contorted face of the screaming child.

It was wonderful to see, after a moment, how the small features gradually straightened; how the twisted mouth resumed its normal shape and how the screwed-up eyes slowly widened once more, and the expression of pain and the terror induced by the pain left them.

At the same time the frantic screaming dwindled to a mere mechanical sobbing and sniffing, and presently even that ended on a long sigh of relief and contentment.

Then my mother lifted her head, opened her eyes, and removed her hands.

"There," she said gently. "It doesn't hurt any more now, dear, does it?"

And the child, gazing at her with wide eyes, and with her mouth gaping from sheer bewilderment, silently shook her head.

"No, of course not!" said my mother quietly,

and then proceeded to mop up the wet mess made by the overturned kettle, and to continue with her preparations for tea as though nothing unusual had happened—as, indeed, for her, nothing had.

The effect of this cure was not temporary—the little girl never felt another pang from the effect of that scald, and, as may be imagined, thereafter she could not fall down and graze her knees, or stick a pin into herself, without screaming for ‘Mrs. Bwuce’ to come and ‘make it well.’

An even more remarkable case was that of an unfortunate lady who was a victim of intermittent madness. The attacks becoming more frequent, it was reluctantly decided by her medical attendant that the only thing to do was to certify her as a lunatic and put her away in an asylum.

In her lucid intervals the poor lady was aware of this, and was terrified at the prospect—as well she might have been, for in those days there were no ‘mental hospitals,’ but only lunatic asylums, which establishments were conducted on far less humane and enlightened lines than is the case to-day.

Somehow or other she had heard of my mother, and as a last resort begged most earnestly that she might see her. Finally on the day before that on which the requisite number of doctors were to examine her, and certify her as a lunatic, the lady’s husband came to our house, explained the case to my mother, and rather diffidently asked her if she would come along and see his wife. It was quite clear from his manner, although he was very polite, that he had no faith whatever in my mother’s powers. It would, he explained, be an act of charity and mercy, even though it was not likely to do any good!

At which my mother gave him one of her quiet, almost secret smiles, and answered :

“ Of course I will come. If you will give me a few minutes to get ready. . . .”

She then went to her room, and after some little time emerged again, dressed for the street.

As a matter of fact her reputation at this time was such in Oxford that she was constantly being called to all sorts of people, most of whom she had never before heard of, suffering from all sorts of pain and illness. I never knew her to refuse such a call, and if she was not always successful in effecting a cure, she invariably brought a certain amount of physical relief and a very great deal of spiritual comfort to all of them.

As in this particular case, I noticed that on such occasions she was always rather longer than usual putting on her outdoor things, and I think this was due to the fact that she always prayed alone in her room before setting out on her expedition of mercy.

On this occasion she accompanied the man to his house, and found the patient perfectly rational. She was enjoying one of her lucid intervals.

“ I shall be able to help you,” my mother told her, “ but we must wait until one of the attacks comes on.”

For a time they sat and talked of everyday, trivial matters. Presently the woman commenced to become excited. She started to talk wildly, and soon, with glaring eyes and wild gestures, she was shouting and screaming all sorts of terrible obscenities.

“ There you are ! ” said the husband, despairingly. “ That is how it takes her, you see ! ”

My mother was looking at her with sad, sympathetic eyes :

"Poor, poor creature !" she said, softly.

Then she went up to her. As she did so the woman spat like a cat, and struck wildly at her with clenched fists.

My mother took not the slightest notice. She placed her two hands on the woman's forehead, and then closed her eyes and bent her own head in prayer.

According to the husband's account the effect was instantaneous. The patient quietened immediately. Her movements were stilled, while her screams and yells died slowly away to mere mutterings, and presently ceased altogether. After a while she lay back in her chair, closed her eyes, and slept.

Only then did my mother remove her hands and open her own eyes. She smiled at the husband :

"She will be perfectly all right now !" she told him.

He stared at her in amazement :

"You—you don't mean that she's *cured* . . . ?"

"Of course !" she answered, quietly. Then, with a glance at the clock : "And now I must run home and get the children's dinner, but you needn't worry any more, you know !"

Of course, the husband did not believe her, even then.

But the following morning, when the examination took place, the doctors could find no trace of insanity ! The woman herself was quite convinced that she was cured, and at her own suggestion she went to a hospital for a week to be under observation. But whereas her attacks had been, up to the time of my mother's visit, coming on to the extent of two or three a day, and lasting for increasingly long periods,

during the whole of that week she was perfectly sane and rational, and she emerged from the hospital the happiest woman, I should say, in the whole of Oxford! not that once during that period had she ever doubted that she was cured.

She eventually lived to quite a good old age, and never, so far as I know, had another attack of dementia.

On at least one occasion my mother's strange curative powers were used in her own home. Both she and my father had been suffering for some time from failing eyesight, and one day he came home and mentioned that at his work that day he had been 'advised'—which, I suppose, really meant practically *ordered*—to get a pair of spectacles without delay.

When he announced this my mother stared at him with an expression of mingled astonishment and indignation on her face:

"Spectacles—for *you*? Really, Walter, I never heard such nonsense. *We* do not need glasses—what we need is a little *faith* . . . !"

I don't know what my mother did about it, but I do know that neither of them wore glasses to their dying day, and that their eyesight got better and remained perfect until the end of their lives!

Well, so much for my parents. They were a wonderful pair—in many ways the best people I have ever known. God-fearing, devout, absolutely conscientious in following their sense of duty, always more ready to work for the good of others than for their own. And if in certain of their ideas they were a trifle mistaken—if in their conduct of their own lives and those of their children there were some errors . . . well, they were, after all, human—and



human beings are seldom perfect. It has also, I believe, been said that those who never make mistakes never make anything else !

I can only say this—that in my youth I may not have properly appreciated the qualities of my father and mother, but, be that as it may, I am proud of them now.

Yet religion, even in its more honest and sincere aspects, has a queer effect on human beings ! There is quite a lot about it that I have never been able to understand, one thing being why so many devout and sincere Christians—almost all of them, I should imagine—regard it as wicked to be light-hearted and happy. Or, at any rate, openly to display happiness.

My father and mother, as I have already explained, were in every way sincere and devout Christians, and I have no doubt but that their faith brought to them personally great happiness of a quiet and undemonstrative kind.

And yet, as it often seemed to me then, at any rate, our home could hardly be described as a happy one—not happy, that is, in the sense in which young children—and especially boys—understand happiness.

Laughter was seldom, if ever, heard in the house. A quiet smile was the utmost demonstration of mirth which could be looked on there with approval. A song, other than a sacred one or a hymn, never !

Although I showed some talent as a musician, and at quite an early age could play the piano, the organ, and the cornet, I would sooner have thought of cutting off one of my hands than of playing a secular tune indoors !

The discipline in our home was, I think I can say

without exaggeration, far more rigid and severe than anything I encountered later in the Navy. 'Spare the rod and spoil the child!' was, undoubtedly, one of my father's favourite proverbs, and he always acted up to it. He was a strong believer in the efficacy of the strap as a means of chastening the young idea, and was always ready—perhaps a little too ready—to resort to it. It had to be a mighty good excuse that would save the culprit's hide from its ungentle caress!

Let there, however, be no mistake about this. I firmly believe that I owe a very great deal to my father's stern disciplining, and to the rather Spartan method by which I was brought up. Only it seems to me to be a great pity that my childhood was not happier (or should I say GAYER; for after all is not gaiety the birthright of young children?) and that my predominant feeling in regard to my father should have been fear, rather than affection.

An incident of my early days which made a great impression on me was a visit by King Edward VII (then, of course, Prince of Wales) to the City, in order to open the new town hall of the City of Oxford.

Being allowed none of the ordinary amusements of boyhood, such as visits to the theatres, music-halls, circuses and so on, I was always particularly keen on not missing any sort of show I could more or less legitimately attend, and this one certainly fell into that category. Loyalty, even to an earthly prince, was not a sentiment which even my parents could regard with disfavour.

Accordingly I was very early on the scene and, as usual, managed to worm my way through the crowd to a really good place in the forefront. The con-

sequence was that I got a really splendid view of His Royal Highness as he drove up and descended from his carriage amid the cheers of the crowd. I, as you may imagine, cheered and yelled as loudly as anyone there, and although I was a trifle disappointed that the Prince did not wear velvet robes and a golden crown, or at any rate a suit of armour and two-handed sword, I was duly impressed by his dignified personality, and particularly with his neat, pointed beard! I decided then and there that I would always be a loyal servant of the Crown, which I understood that Prince Albert, as he was sometimes called in those days, would eventually wear. It seemed to me that I was now personally acquainted with him—and, of course, to serve a monarch whom you knew *personally* was a very different matter from serving one known only to you by means of the highly coloured oleographs given away with Christmas numbers and on grocers' almanacs! At any rate, that's how I felt about it!

After the ceremony at the 'Town Hall the crowd made, *en masse* (and I, of course, with them), for the Martyrs' Memorial, in Magdalen Street, near Balliol College, where I saw what seemed to me one of the most wonderful sights imaginable—the roasting of an ox, whole, in the open street!

To me, who had never seen a joint of meat of more than a few pounds' weight, this was a marvel indeed—and my joy in the whole proceeding was brought to the pitch of something like ecstasy when, the great beast being considered properly cooked, a portion was handed to me to devour in my fingers, in common with all others in the forefront of the crowd.

I rather fancy that I pretended that I was a

cannibal, gnawing the bones of my worst enemy—at any rate, I decided that this was the way a *man* should live.

I think it was the feeling of loyalty evoked by my near sight of the Prince of Wales that fired me with a desire to join the Church Lads' Brigade, more commonly known in those days as 'The Boys' Brigade.'

Rather to my surprise my father made no objection, and I duly joined up. I took it all very seriously, and was so earnest and enthusiastic a brigadier that I was speedily promoted to sergeant, a position of which I was enormously proud. It gave me my first taste of Service discipline, and I took to it as a duck takes to water.

Another great man—though not particularly famous in those days—whose face was familiar to me was Lord (then, I think, a mere Lieutenant-Colonel) Baden-Powell, who had a fine house in Oxford.

I used to take an interest in him—particularly after joining the brigade—because I knew him to be a soldier, and I was enthusiastic about all things military in those days.

He certainly looked every inch a soldier, and I often used to hang around to get a look at him, and sometimes even followed him, at a respectful distance, when he was out walking.

When the Boer War broke out, and he went to take over a command in South Africa, I, in common with most Oxford lads, made him my special hero of the War. Lord! how we followed his career out there—and the mingled anxiety and pride with which we received the news of the siege of Mafeking! our fear and depression when it was

thought that the gallant little town and its brave defenders must fall! And then the terrific joy when, late one evening, news came through of the relief.

It is notorious that the whole of England went mad on Mafeking night, but I doubt if any city in it went quite so raving as Oxford.

Even my father, much to my surprise, made no remonstrance when, at an hour when I should normally have been in bed, or well on the way there, I went rushing out to join the yelling, shouting throng who were making for the centre of the city. As we went, fireworks were being let off, men were firing guns and pistols into the air, and people who could find no other means of expressing their feelings were even lighting newspapers and tossing them down from upper windows on to the heads of the crowd!

In due course we formed up into a sort of procession, and, most of us carrying such inflammable material as we could lay hands on, marched off to Baden-Powell's house, outside which we built and lit an enormous bonfire.

It was one of the strangest sights I have ever seen. Highly respectable dons and prosperous business men waved Union Jacks and sang and danced in company with working men in their corduroys and tramps in their rags. We sang 'The Absent-minded Beggar,' 'Good-bye, Dolly Grey,' 'The Soldiers of the Queen,' and other popular patriotic numbers.

Certainly one saw the most amazing sights—which have probably never been equalled before or since, not even on that other hectic occasion, the first Armistice Day—but at the time took them as being quite normal.

I remember as we surged and danced round that

fire outside Baden-Powell's house seeing a gentleman in morning-coat and white waistcoat, who looked like a prosperous banker, or something of that kind. He stood near the fire, and held both the hands of a flashy looking girl who might have been a gipsy, from the look of her, and they sang in unison, swinging their arms to and fro as they did so, 'The Soldiers of the Queen,' ending each line of the chorus with a smacking kiss. Like this :

' And if you ask me how it's . . . (*kiss*)  
And why it . . . (*kiss*)  
We've always . . . (*kiss*)  
We'll proudly point to every . . . (*kiss*)  
Of Britain's soldiers of the . . . (*kiss-kiss*) '

And when they'd finished singing he slipped his arm round her waist and waltzed her right up to the edge of the fire, so that her skirt caught alight and had to be put out by another laughing onlooker.

What a mad, glorious night . . . !

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOOL, CHOIR, AND APPRENTICESHIP

ONE of my father's great mottoes was : ' Satan finds mischief yet for idle hands to do ! ' And he certainly saw to it that I ran as little risk from having idle hands as anybody !

I cannot remember exactly at what age I started school, but when I did I attended St. Clement's, which was what was then known as a board school, the precursor of the county council school of to-day. We paid no fees for our schooling, but every Saturday morning we had to take a penny to school to pay for our books.

Our schoolmaster was one of the old brigade—somewhat, in fact, of the Squeers variety. He believed in practical teaching, even if he did not get so far as the Squeers formula of ' W-I-N-D-E-R, winder ! Now go and clean it ! '

In appearance he was much like a figure that became familiar to us all in the Great War ; the first time I set eyes on Captain Bairnsfather's drawing of ' Old Bill ' I exclaimed :

" Good Lord, that's my old schoolmaster, Mr. Walters, to the life ! "

And so it was—he might have sat for the drawing as a model—but for the fact that I expect he was old and grey by that time.

He drove the three ' Rs ' into our recalcitrant heads with the liberal help of the good old-fashioned

birch on our hides—in that way, at least, he was a man after my father's own heart—and the sight of a class sitting down after, say, a reading lesson, was a demonstration in itself of his powers in that direction. Most of us sat down as though we were going to recline on a box of eggs.

He was also very fond of the imposition, and one of his favourites was that which he invariably imposed for being late.

It was revealing in its way, for it was the only evidence I ever encountered of Mr. Walters having anything of a leaning towards the higher arts. It was a kind of poem, and, I am pretty sure, was composed by himself. I have had to write it so many times that even to this day I remember every word of it. Here it is :

*'To be in good time is a necessary Rule,  
And none should be found coming past the Hour to School,  
For Lazy Boys who come too late is a bad and sad Disgrace,  
And oft-times we find them with Dirty Hands and Face !'*

Another of his favourite punishments was to make a boy stand up in the middle of the class with his slate held above his head in both hands—a singularly barbaric form of punishment capable of inflicting a torture on the victim almost as bad as that practised by the Spanish Inquisition.

However, in spite of all these drawbacks, I found school pleasant enough. As far as my lessons were concerned there was little need in my case for the stimulus of Mr. Walters's birch. I liked learning for its own sake, and it came quite easily to me. My share of the said birch—quite a liberal one—came to me casually for more venial offences.

My father arranged for me to have my voice tested by the choirmaster at the church of St. Mary



the Virgin, in Oxford High Street. I passed my test with flying colours, and so became a member of the choir. But my father was not satisfied with that. It was arranged that I should learn to play the harmonium, and Miss Bullbeck, the organist at St. Clement's (I believe she still holds that post to-day), was given the task of teaching me. In all things I have always been an apt pupil, and I do not think the good lady found me much trouble.

My father next decided that it would be very nice if I could also play the cornet! Accordingly he arranged that I should take lessons from Bandmaster Taylor, of the Oxford Volunteers. And so, what with the Boys' Brigade, choir practices, and my lessons on harmonium and cornet, my evenings were completely filled up. No idleness left at all for the Master of Evil to use as a lever for my ultimate damnation!

One of the chief advantages about belonging to the choir was that one actually earned money at it. I received 13s. 6d. per quarter as my ordinary choir-boy's fee, and an extra five shillings for singing solo, an honour which was soon accorded me since my voice developed well under training. I may add that my father, who did not believe in young people having money of their own, used to take it all, a fact which, reasonably or not, rather embittered me at the time.

The church of St. Mary the Virgin was (and, of course still is) full of tradition. The original church is said to have been built by Alfred the Great. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book, and not as a new or recent building. The present building dates back at least to the reign of Stephen. It was here that Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley stood their

trial during the reign of Bloody Mary, and the church was also the scene of Cranmer's withdrawal of his recantation, which sent him to the stake. The statue of the Virgin and Child, over the porch, figured as one of the articles of impeachment against Archbishop Laud. The grave of the unfortunate Amy Robsart also is in the church, at the upper end of the choir stalls.

It was here, then, that I learned to sing like an angel, if not to behave like one. During this period of my life I made many good friends—Bandmaster Taylor, Miss Bullbeck, Miss Chapman of the Caroline Street Mission, and, in particular, the Rev. Ernest F. Smith, perhaps the best friend of them all, and certainly one of the strangest as well as one of the most charming men I have ever known.

His story, from first to last, is a strange one. There was something of a mystery about his past when I knew him, but I have since been given to understand that he was an American by birth and, when he came over to this country in the late 'eighties, a millionaire—though whether dollar or pound I do not know.

In this country he became a naturalized British subject, and afterwards entered into Holy Orders, being ordained at Rochester in 1893. Soon after that he became a curate at St. Mary's.

He was known everywhere as the most generous of men. And in the end it was, apparently, his extraordinary generosity that finished him.

We were, as I have said, great friends, and I have before me now a letter which he wrote to me in 1935 (I believe that was the year, though the letter is dated only 'June 14th,' without any year).

It commences like this :

‘ MY DEAR OLD HENRY,

‘ It gave me great delight to receive your letter, and I am very proud indeed that you remember me so kindly after all these years. A quarter of a century is a big slice in one’s life and I remember you so vividly and affectionately that I can hardly believe it’s as long as that since we last saw each other. . . .’

And it finishes :

‘ Your very affectionate friend,

ERNEST F. SMITH.’

In the body of the letter he expresses an earnest hope that we should soon meet. But, alas, that never happened, for within a short time of receiving that cheerful and kindly letter I was amazed and horrified to learn that my old friend had committed suicide !

And the reason was, I should say, a unique one, for I heard later that he had, owing to his innate generosity, actually given away his last penny, and had nothing left to carry on with. So he killed himself.

Our great day at St. Mary’s was, for us choir-boys at any rate, that one which fell in the merry month of May, when we used to sally forth, complete with white surplices and with long wands in our hands, to indulge in the historic ceremony of ‘ beating the bounds ’ of the parish of St. Mary’s.

We used to start off somewhere in the neighbourhood of Brasenose College, and then proceed via Corpus Christi, Holywell, and Queen’s College, to finish by the Bodleian Library.

At each point where we stopped to beat the bounds, spectators scattered coppers for us to scramble for. It followed that our snowy surplices were not quite so white at the end of the ceremony as they were at the beginning, but that did not worry us much, and I, being a strong and sturdy boy, used to do quite well on these occasions, seldom finishing up with less than three shillings' worth of coppers in my pockets. These activities finished up with a breakfast provided for us at Brasenose, to which, as you may be sure, we did full justice.

As time passed my activities in the church increased and expanded. In addition to singing in the choir, I used to blow the organ for the organist when he was practising, and later on I became assistant bell-ringer, with three of the huge bells to handle all on my own. I could never have done this had I not been an unusually husky and muscular lad.

But despite all these activities I found my life becoming increasingly monotonous, and there is no doubt but that there was a lot too much religion about it to be really healthy for a young boy. I also became more than a little embittered—I had no sort of personal liberty at all, and all the money I earned my father took.

As I became more proficient in my organ and cornet playing, too, I found that my father expected me to perform at open-air meetings, which was a further tie.

I could only see one way of emancipating myself—to leave school and get out to work as soon as possible. So I set seriously to work to obtain a 'labour certificate'—which meant, according to the educational laws of the time, that I was sufficiently educated to leave school and start work.

I got my certificate when I was twelve, and shall never forget the day when I went home and proudly told my parents that I was now ready and eager to leave school and get to work.

"Good!" exclaimed my father, evidently pleased at this proof of my industry. "You have done well. As it happens there's a job going for a boy up at the works—I'll see about it for you at once!"

This was a decided blow! My father at that time was an engineer in the employ of the Oxford Electric Company, and, so far as a job went, that was as good as any other from my point of view. But it meant that, even at work, I should still be more or less under the eye of my father, and that did not suit my book at all.

However, I knew it was no use saying anything, so I acquiesced, but with a private vow that I wouldn't stick it a moment longer than I was obliged.

The following Monday morning saw me trotting off to the works with my father, feeling mighty proud of myself at the thought that I was now a working man, and no longer a schoolboy. I should have felt prouder still, though, had I been going off to some job on my own and minus the parental conveying.

I found the job unpleasant enough, too, and I particularly objected to walking about most of the time with a bandage round my mouth to prevent the copper-dust from getting down my throat.

It wasn't long before I started a steady old grumble about the job, working at it steadily on the principle that 'constant dripping water wears away the hardest stone'—'the hardest stone' in this case being my father. Eventually my tactics succeeded, and the constant dripping water did its work. For

one night, after we had come home from work and had our meal, my father said abruptly :

“ Henry, put on your best clothes and brush your hair. We are going into town.”

“ Whatever for, Father ? ”

“ I’ve decided that you are quite right in wanting to learn a skilled trade. We’re going to see about your apprenticeship.”

How my heart leapt at that ! I should have liked to ask more questions, but was afraid to. I hurriedly changed my clothes and set out with my father. And so it came about that, on 28 April, 1905, I was duly bound apprentice to John Healey Grant, off Princes Street, Oxford, to serve him as apprentice for the period of five years from that date, and to learn the trade of general smith, the said John Healey Grant agreeing to pay me, as apprentice, the sum of three and sixpence for my first week’s work, gradually rising to the colossal sum of eight shillings per week until the end of my apprenticeship.

The indentures duly signed and all settled, I had another proud moment when I walked to work for the first time in a job of my own and, for the time being at any rate, free from my father’s leading strings. So you may bet that I strode along the road with something of a swagger, and with my chin held mighty high !

But once again I was to learn that pride cometh before a fall . . . !

I walked into the forge as cock-a-hoop as you like, to find myself meeting the grave regard of six huge men, stripped to the waist and with hammers in their hands.

“ And who are you, young shaver ? ” asked one of them, with a note in his voice that rather scared me.

I felt the cockiness running out of the toes of my boots as I replied, in a voice which I couldn't for the life of me keep from sounding rather timid and quavery :

“ Oh, I'm the new apprentice, if you please ! ”

“ You are, are you ? ” said the man, looking at me as though I was some queer zoological specimen. Then, after regarding me thus for a few moments, during which time I felt myself getting smaller and smaller and going rather red about the gills, he went on : “ Well, if you're the new apprentice, you'll have to be christened. That's so, isn't it, boys ? ” Turning to the others, from whom the answer came in a sort of solemn unison :

“ That's right enough ! ”

Next minute, before I knew what was happening, they had got hold of me, whipped off my clothing, and soused me well and truly in the tank used for cooling red-hot iron tyres ! Luckily I had the sense not to cry out or protest in any way, and they thought all the better of me for taking their rough handling in good part.

So I was put in front of the furnace to dry off, and then told to put my clothes on again and go and get them some beer !

My first few months as a blacksmith were occupied mainly in fetching and carrying, and especially in getting beer for the six hearty, thirsty smiths. And so I got my first experience of the inside of a public house, and found it disappointingly quiet and orderly, after all the terrible things I had heard about such places from my father. Thus a belief, already forming in my mind, that he was apt to exaggerate about such things became confirmed.

My first real job as a smith came with the

coming of winter, and consisted of putting 'frost-nails' in the horse-shoes, of which we handled an enormous quantity, as we had the contract for the shoeing of all the horses belonging to the Oxford Omnibus Company. And they kept us pretty busy.

There were, of course, no such things as motor buses in those days, though they were on their way.

As a matter of fact the first motor bus I ever saw was being experimented with by another of our customers, a gentleman whom we then spoke of, rather disrespectfully, as 'Bill Morris.'

We did a lot of forging for him, and in my early apprentice days I often used to have the job of taking small pieces of work to his shop and works, then situated in Queen's Lane off the High Street. The shop was quite a small one, and dealt mostly in cycles and motor-bicycles.

His experimental motor buses caused quite a lot of talk, and a good deal of amusement, in Oxford. We regarded them at first as noisy, smelly things that would never really 'catch on,' because of their awkward habit of continually breaking down.

He soon got into hot water with the University authorities over them, as their noise disturbed the students at their work, and the fumes half-choked passers-by in the streets. So he was compelled to do his experimental work with them outside the confines of the city.

As the years of my apprenticeship rolled on I got to know him quite well. He was a genial, kindly fellow, whose avowed motto was 'Sacrifice, not self,' and he had an enormous capacity for hard work and a keen eye for anything new or novel, as witness the matter of the motor buses. As time



wore on we became quite friendly, and it used to be 'Bill' and 'Harry' with us.

To-day he is known to the world as Lord Nuffield, and, although I daresay he has forgotten entirely the young blacksmith with whom he was at one time so friendly, I, as an Oxford man, as an ex-Service man, and as a member of the British Legion, fully appreciate all that he has done since he achieved fame and fortune, and most sincerely take off my hat to him.

To revert to my own life, however. My new job as a blacksmith's apprentice certainly gave a fresh tang to it and livened it up a little. Nevertheless, as the years went on, I found my life still very monotonous. I could hardly help laughing in a not very mirthful way when I heard someone playing or singing 'Rule, Britannia!' 'Britains never shall be slaves . . .' When I heard those words I used to think, nonsense! If ever there was a slave, I am one.

And certainly, looking back upon it, my life in those days did amount to a sort of slavery. Up soon after dawn and away to work. Home for breakfast at 8.30, and eating it to the monotonous sound of my mother reading the Scriptures to me. More work till dinner, and then a repetition of the same thing. Work again in the afternoon, and then the evening meal under similar conditions.

In the evening, it was either choir practice or organ-blowing, or, if I was not wanted at the church, then my father expected me either to play my cornet at some open-air meeting, or the harmonium at one of our own 'cottage meetings.'

Anyway as the term of my apprenticeship drew towards its close I became more and more determined that, somehow, I would get away from it all.

Of just what I should do, I was doubtful. I had a sort of mental examination of myself, and saw myself as a well-set up, husky young man of twenty-one, muscularly strong, mentally fairly efficient and fully alive, with the trade of smith at my fingertips, and a good player on both organ and cornet. It seemed to me that there ought to be a place for me somewhere outside Oxford, and away from the atmosphere of religion.

The day came at last when my indentures were handed back to me, and I was *free*. Also, being now twenty-one years of age, I was legally my own master. Nothing to stop me going where I would or doing what I liked, except a very real regard for my parents, and a dislike of hurting them more than was necessary in the process of finding my own freedom.

I continued to work for Grant for a week or two while I looked around me.

The decisive note was struck when, strolling into a public house one evening for a drink (my parents knew nothing of that!), I found a sailor installed in the bar. He was home on leave, and, his tongue loosened by beer, was loudly extolling the virtues of His Majesty's Navy. For King Edward was on the throne by then, and I suddenly remembered my old determination that some day I would serve him. I had a quiet chat with the sailor, and when I learned that there was a good opening for blacksmiths in the Navy—well, that settled it!

I finally decided that I would join the Navy, and forthwith set about making my plans for leaving home.

I may say that I did not take this step without a pang—nor, I may mention, did I arrive at my decision without at least an attempt to achieve some

sort of independence and to make some sort of a free life for myself while still remaining with the old folk.

But this had proved quite impossible. How impossible the following incident will, perhaps, show.

There was a row at home because I had come home one evening later than my father approved of—he expected me, even at my age, to be indoors by nine at night. And, in the course of the row, I ventured to point out to him that I had now attained years of discretion, and that, after all, I was too big for him to use the strap on.

His reply was characteristic.

He went out of the kitchen, returning a moment later with the key of the front door, which he carefully placed on the table. He then took off his coat and slowly rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and while he was doing this he said :

“ Well, son, there’s the key of the front door—of *my* front door. Now, if you can give me a hiding, you can have that key, and come in at what time you like. But if I give you one—then the key remains mine, and you’ll come in when I tell you to. Understand . . . ? ”

I did, perfectly !

We got to it, but it was hardly a fair combat. I could not bring myself to use my fists against my father as I would have done against any ordinary opponent, and he gave me a good walloping. I may say that he would probably have done that in any case, for he was a very hefty man, and no novice at boxing.

Anyway, he kept the key, and I was forced to continue to come in at an hour when all the ordinary schoolboys were still larking in the streets.

Small wonder that I felt an urge, however reluctant, to leave home and live my own life.

Once having made up my mind, I lost no time. There was a naval recruiting office in Oxford, and the following day I reported there.

"So you want to join the Navy, eh?" said the official in charge. "Well, you look a likely enough lad. What's your age?"

I told him: "Twenty-one!"

"Good! Got a trade?"

"Yes, I've just finished my apprenticeship as a smith!"

"You're just the fellow they want in the Navy, my lad. Good luck to you!"

With which he made me out a railway warrant, and gave me my instructions for journeying to London by train early the following morning, and I went home with strangely mixed feelings of exultation and guilt.

In the evening I announced to my parents:

"I've finished with Grant. Packed up to-night!"

My father fixed me with a grave, almost an accusatory look:

"Do you mean you've been sacked? Have you been . . . !"

"I don't mean that at all!" I interrupted him.

"I haven't been up to anything, and I haven't been sacked. I have left of my own accord, because I reckon I've learned all I'm likely to there, and I want to better myself!"

"I see. What are you going to do, then?"

"Go off on my bicycle to-morrow morning and see if I can find another job!"

My father simply grunted at this, and returned to his reading of the Bible.

And the following morning, with my heart beating a little faster than usual, I went off on my bike. I left the machine with a friend, presented my railway warrant at the station booking office, and, from the window of the train, bade my last farewell to Oxford as a civilian.

## CHAPTER III

### JOINING THE NAVY

I HAD been instructed by the official in the recruiting office to look out on the platform at Paddington for a sergeant with a red sash, and told that he would look after me.

When the train rolled up to the platform and I alighted, I almost immediately caught sight of a big Coldstreamer, towering above the rest of the crowd.

Even as I made for him, he made for me. He seemed to be able to pick out a recruit on sight.

"You for the Army?" he demanded.

"For the Navy!" I corrected him.

He grunted, disgustedly:

"Pity! You might have made a good sojer—when you'd been knocked into shape!" He glanced at a paper in his hand. "You'll be Bruce, H. J., won't you?"

"For the rest of my life, I expect!" I grinned at him. I was feeling wonderfully free and lively.

He made a tick on his paper, and looked at me from under his eyebrows:

"That's right!" he remarked. "Only don't get *too* smart, not yet! It doesn't always pay, you know! Now, come along—we'll have to wait a bit—got

some more of you bloomin' rookies to pick up yet!"

Eventually it was a heterogeneous mob of about a dozen that he led off to Whitehall. On the way I had a talk to some of the others. Most of them were joining up because they were sick of being out of work and doing nothing—and they looked it. One was joining because he had had a row with his parents—another because he had had one with his girl. All except these two were pretty cheerful—and none of them except myself was for the Navy.

However, when we got to Whitehall there seemed to be literally swarms of recruits for both services—business must have been brisk that day.

We were herded like a flock of sheep at a shearing—it seemed strange to me then, but I got used to it afterwards—and then we were passed from desk to desk while we 'gave our particulars' . . .

"What's your surname?"

"Bruce!"

"Christian . . . ?"

(The fellow in front of me replied to this, with great indignation: "O' course I'm a Christian—wot d'you take me for, a bleedin' Hottentot?" But I was quicker than that, and answered correctly.)

"Henry Joseph."

"Age . . . ?"

"Religion?"

I hesitated at that, and the clerk said, without looking up:

"Better be Church of England, old man—it saves a lot of trouble!"

I agreed, and he wrote 'C/E' on my sheet.

We were marched into a long, bare room—a table at each end, with clerks sitting writing. At one end of the room a great sheet, with letters of various sizes on it, and lines of different thicknesses; at the other a weighing machine.

A sergeant gave us a curt order:

“Strip—and look slippy about it!”

We stripped. I didn’t much like taking off all my clothes in front of that gang, but I noticed that most of the others seemed to feel the same way about it, and drew consolation from that. ‘We were all in the same boat!’ How often in after years was I to find consolation in that old tag . . . !

The M.O. was short, fattish, and brisk in his manner.

“Let me look at your eyes—tongue. H’m. . . . Now, cough . . . pull back. . . . Breathe deeply. Say ‘ninety-nine.’ Shut your eyes, and stand to attention . . . !”

His examination of myself was more perfunctory than of the others, but he gave me more attention:

“You come out of a good factory! What’s your age?”

“Twenty-one, sir!”

“H’m! Got a trade?”

“Yes, sir. Blacksmith!”

“H’m, that accounts for some of it. Hell, if they were all like you, it ’ud cut my work in half. Right—passed. Next man . . . !”

“Come on—this way . . . !”

I was hustled to the far end of the room and had my eyes tested—and found perfect. Then down to the opposite end.

“Jump on here, my hearty!”



I stood on the scales and then up against a painted scale on the wall. Height and weight recorded.

"Any marks on body—let's see . . . !"

A mole here, and a scar there. All noted :

"Right! Now get back into your duds—and jump to it!"

As I dressed I saw that about twenty-five per cent or more of our number had been rejected. They dressed slowly, mostly looking pretty sick about it.

Into another room. Attestation. Taking the oath to serve King Edward, his heirs and successors. Remembering that day of the opening of the town hall, I mouthed the phrases with some gusto. . . .

"Blimey, you ought to 'a bin an actor—or a parson—not a sailor . . . !"

Yet another room. Clerks busy with our papers, and issuing railway warrants.

"Bruce, H. J. What you joining as? Blacksmith's mate, eh! Right—go to that table there. You'll take your test at Chatham!"

Given a railway warrant, and ration money. There are some half-dozen of us only for Chatham—all mechanics. The rest are for Sheerness, Portsmouth, and elsewhere.

We six march off together, for Victoria Station, via a meal and a drink. I feel very elated with things.

We examine each other with some curiosity—we are to be mates—only they call it 'mess-mates' in the Navy, of course.

We get our meal, and are conducted to Victoria, and put in the train for Chatham.

In the train we get to know each other a bit, and some of us toss for pennies.

At Chatham we are met by a P.O.

“Come on, you lubbers, show a leg. You’re in the Navy now, you know . . . !”

I march out of the station with the others, feeling very important. I’m in the Navy, now . . . !

## CHAPTER IV

### ‘THE KING’S NAVEE . . .’

THE Naval Barracks at Chatham I did not find very inspiring. Rather too much like a prison for my liking. But I soon got used to all that.

The first night in the barrack bedroom, or dormitory, was a queer experience, too. It was the first time I’d ever slept away from home, and the first time I’d ever slept in a room with more than one other occupant. I felt strangely lonely, and, curiously enough, considering all the trouble I had taken to get away from it, more than a little homesick !

However, there was all the excitement of a new life before me.

Next morning there was the doctor to pass once more and the dentist as well. My teeth were all right, thank goodness !

Then followed a period I didn’t expect. I think I had had a vision of being put straight aboard ship and sent right off to sea, and being taught the business of a sailor by a big, bullying bos’n swinging a rope’s end !

Instead of that it was the barrack-square, with marching left and right, forming fours, and what-not, physical jerks, rifle and bayonet drill, and so on. More like being trained for a soldier than a sailor, I thought !

I passed my blacksmith’s test with ease, and automatically became a Second-Class Petty Officer. I discovered that before becoming a first-class one I should have to pass an educational test, so I decided to go to night-school, right away.

There were various other tests to pass, too—and one of the most important, from our point of view, was the swimming test. Because, until a man was a passed-out swimmer, he wasn’t allowed any leave—wasn’t even allowed into the town of an evening.

When he had passed out each man was given a card, and that had to be shown at the gate before leaving the barracks. No card—no leave!

The test was to swim twice round the hulk from which we went into the water. Owing to this regulation about leave, a good many fellows used to take their test before they were really fit for it, and on the occasion on which I took mine the man who went into the water before me was by no means a capable swimmer. He got a touch of cramp, lost his head, and had gone down twice before they managed to fish him out.

The Instructor was annoyed :

“And how about *you* ? ” he inquired, with a sour look at me—the next for test. “D’you reckon *you* can swim ? ”

I was feeling bright that morning, so I answered :

“Well, of course, it’s difficult to be *sure* about anything. But I *hope* so, because . . . ! ”

I had been standing right on the edge of the diving-platform, and as I spoke I pretended to slip, and apparently fell into the sea. I went under and remained under as long as I could, so that when I came up there was considerable excitement on the hulk, and preparations for a rescue.

I called out, cheerily :

"It isn't half cold . . . !"

And then I started off on an over-arm crawl, in an endeavour to get round the hulk at record-breaking speed. Having been round her twice in this fashion, I climbed back aboard, dripping and grinning.

The Instructor gave me a nasty look :

"So you *can* swim!" he commented, as he marked me : 'Passed.'

"Yes," I answered, cheekily. "I rather *thought* I could, you know!"

"I tell you what I think," said the Instructor, grimly. "I don't think you'll ever be drowned, my lad!"

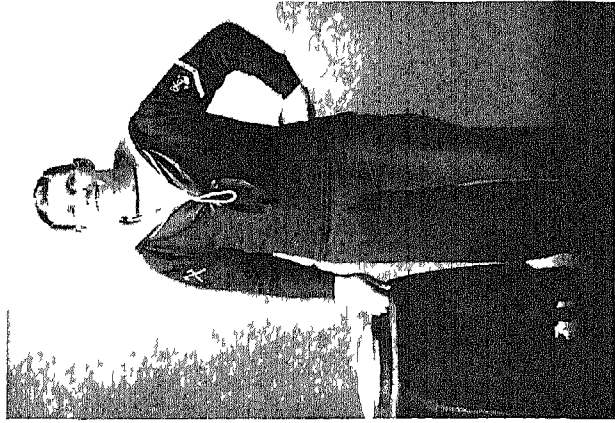
"Well, that's a comfort, anyway!"

"The reason being," he went on, "that you'll be blurry well hanged before that, if you get your deserts!"

I now discovered a method of making a little extra pocket money—by hiring out my swimming card to fellows who wanted to go out in the evenings while I was at night-school. It would fetch anything from sixpence to half-a-crown for an evening, according to the demand for it and the proximity of pay-day.

I felt very proud of myself when I first got into uniform, and I took the earliest opportunity of sitting (or, rather, standing—see illustration) for my photograph.

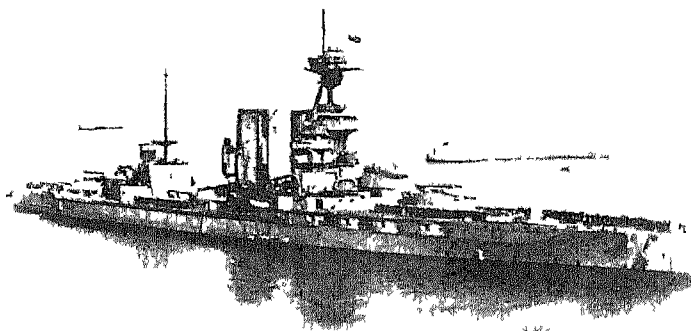
The following week-end I got my first 'long week-end' leave, and took this opportunity to go home and explain matters to my parents. So far I had only sent them a brief note from Chatham, with no address on it, saying that I 'had got a good, steady job,' and that I would come along and see them shortly.



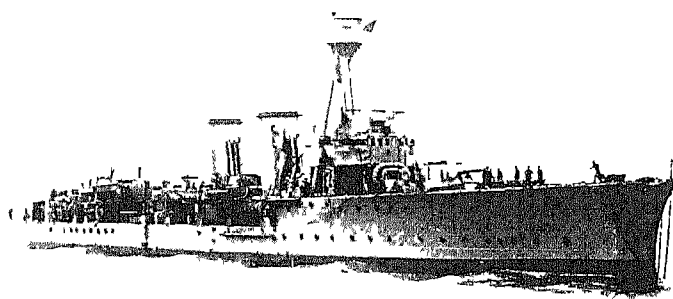
THE AUTHOR SHORTLY AFTER  
JOINING THE NAVY  
(see page 48)



FOUR C.P.O.'s OF THE CURAÇOA  
WHEN SHE TOOK KING OLAF  
BACK TO NORWAY MR BRUCE  
IS SEATED ON THE RIGHT  
(see Chap XX)



H M S *MARLBOROUGH*  
(see Chap XXVIII)



H.M.S. *CURAÇOA*  
(see Chap. XIX)

I can't say that I fancied the showdown at all, for I was pretty sure that both my parents regarded the Army and Navy as sinks of iniquity, and would think of anyone belonging to either service as a lost soul. That their eldest son should have become a sailor was likely to be a severe shock and, from my father, at any rate, to bring the vials of wrath crashing about my devoted head.

So I didn't feel too good as I left the train and walked through the familiar streets of Oxford once more in the direction of home. It was queer how strange in a way those streets seemed—it was as though I had not seen them for years, instead of having left them only a week or two before. So much seemed to have happened in the interim!

And the nearer I got to home, the worse I felt. But I was comforted by the uniform I wore—somehow it seemed like a certificate that my father's authority over me was now ended, as, indeed, it was. I was also further consoled by the surprise of the one or two friends I met, the curious stares of people I knew only by sight, and the obvious excitement and admiration of one or two girls I knew. So that, finally, I entered our house with something very much like a swagger.

My mother stared at me and went rather white. But all she said was :

" Henry ! Whatever are you dressed up like that for . . . ? "

" I've joined the Navy, Mother," I told her—rather as though I was confessing to some piece of wrong-doing. " I'm a sailor, now ! "

My father came in from the scullery, and looked at me with stern eyes.



"So *that's* what you've been up to, is it! I rather suspected something like it!"

Anyone would have thought I'd committed some awful crime!

My mother spoke again, with more excitement and emotion in her voice than was usual with her:

"Oh, but we can't have this! We—we will buy him out, Walter . . .!"

"We will do nothing of the kind!" said my father, grimly. "He's made his bed—let him lie upon it! Besides, it may do him good—he'll learn some discipline in the Navy!"

I almost laughed at that—considering that, after the discipline of my father in the home, the discipline of the Navy was rather like being spoiled . . .!

However, on the whole, they both took it a good deal better than I had expected, and I was very glad of it. I tried to make up to them as far as possible by playing at all the meetings that took place during my leave, and, so far as the open-air ones were concerned, my uniform seemed to form an attraction. At any rate there were far more young girls there than usual, I noticed! If my father also noticed this, he did not comment upon it. At the end of my leave we parted on far more affectionate terms than had ever been evident before, and I was very pleased about it all.

Back in barracks again, and the round of drills, schooling, and patrols—with the addition now that I was taught crafting and splicing, how to sling my hammock, and so on.

Some of the patrols were curious. For instance, on night-patrol in the bedrooms one had to bend and dodge under the slung hammocks with their snoring occupants, and once every hour give a shake

to men who were specially ear-marked on account of their weak bladders.

Canteen-patrol was my favourite, because I was able to take part in the sing-song, and it was the custom to give the best singer of the evening a half-crown. In this connection I could always knock the other singers into a cocked-hat, because apart from the quality of my voice it was well trained. So canteen patrol for me always meant an extra half-crown, which was a lot in those days.

At that time my pay, after deductions for messing and so on, amounted to less than a pound a week, and I was always keen to earn a bit more.

I soon discovered a method of doing this, by turning myself into a 'Dobbie Firm,' or laundry. I entered into an arrangement with the drying-room attendant so as to get the clothes dried, and soon was doing a thriving week-end business, washing blankets at 1s. a time, duck-shirts at 6d., and flannels for 2d. But eventually I had to drop this, owing to losses by pilfering. The stuff used to vanish from the drying-room in the most remarkable manner, and in the end it became a case of 'hang 'em up and lose 'em!' So I decided to pack it up before I bankrupted myself making good the losses!

Meanwhile I was following my trade of blacksmith aboard the ships that came into the dockyard for repair. I found that, as blacksmith's mate, I had dropped into a good job. Even to-day the smith is regarded as one of the most useful naval mechanics, and was even more so in those days, before the new acetylene welding came into use.

In 1911 I was commissioned to my first ship—the cruiser *Hogue*. Here I found myself in rather

strange quarters, as I had to mess with a mixed crowd of carpenters, coopers, painters, plumbers, and signalmen. However, I soon shook down to that all right.

We each had to take our turn at cooking and preparing meals. My knowledge of such things was slight, and I didn't fancy the idea of being responsible for giving the men a good meal and at the same time cutting the mess-bill as fine as possible. However, it had to be done, so I made the best of it.

Not only that, but I was determined to distinguish myself as a cook, and give them something a bit different.

For some time before my turn was due, I might have been seen snooping round the other messes, sniffing at the bakes and stews, and mentally criticizing the duffs and puddings.

I carried my memory back to some of our special dishes at home, and at last got a brain-wave for giving them a 'three-decker' and a good currant-duff with spice in it to follow.

The great day came, and I was the busiest bee in all that ship's hive, and, I should imagine, pale with anxiety.

My meat dish went smoothly enough, but when it came to mixing the duff, I couldn't somehow attain the right consistency. I decided that this was due to the fact that I had not enough spice in it, so I added more, and more. In the end I had put several tins of spice into the confounded thing, and still it didn't seem much better.

In the end I had to let it go and hope for the best, as time was getting on.

I served up my meat dish in good, equal portions, and heard my praises sounded loudly and en-

thusiastically, not only on the score of excellence of cooking, but also because of the novelty of the dish.

I puffed out with pride, and said to myself :

‘That’s all right, my bully-boys ! You wait till you get my spiced duff, and then you can write home to mother and tell her you’ve had a real good dinner, for once !’

My success with the first course, you may note, had fully restored my confidence in my own skill as a cook.

But, alas, pride cometh . . . !

When it came to dishing out the duff, and I went to take the cloth off it . . . ! Horror on horror’s head ! I couldn’t get the cloth off it at all—the whole thing had gone to the consistency of a brick, with the cloth itself as an integral part of it ! *I had forgotten to put any suet into it.*

The enthusiasm engendered in the hearts of my mess-mates by the success of my first course made my downfall on the second all the heavier !

I was chased all round the ship by a ravening mob of frustrated duff-eaters, and what happened when I was captured was nobody’s business ! I know it gave me a firm prejudice against any further experiments in duff-cooking !

My appointment to the *Hogue* had been a bit of a blow in one way. The commission would last for twelve months, and that meant a delay in passing my test as a first-class mechanic, with its promotion to first-class P.O., and extra pay.

But I saw a way out when, one day, they called for volunteers to become divers, and explained that this meant an extra sixpence a day pay, plus extra money for time actually spent under water. Volunteers would be sent back to Chatham for instruction.

I volunteered, and back to Chatham I went for three months' instruction as a diver. I am not so sure that, had I known what I was taking on, I should ever have volunteered.

I was only a youngster then, and had not learned that in the Navy, as in the Army, it is never safe to volunteer for anything—because when they call for volunteers it means that whatever it is for it certainly is not likely to be all beer and skittles, or to have very much jam on it !

## CHAPTER V

### EARLY DIVING DAYS

LIFE at Sheerness as a learner-diver was rather different. No drills or P.T.'s now, but days spent in taking diving instructions, and not much else to do except one's share of the usual barrack duties. The great thing was that I was able to resume my night-school classes.

Certainly the diving instruction was, from the very beginning, not too comfortable a business. We took our classes in the theory of diving down in the cellars of Sheerness dockyard, and for coldness and dampness they wanted a lot of whacking.

Any complaints about this were met with the entirely unanswerable argument :

"What, worrying about cold and damp—and you going to be a *diver* . . . ! What d'you think it's like at the bottom of the sea, then—all nice and dry and heated . . . ?"

So in the cold and damp we had to stand around and take instruction on how to adjust one's diving-dress, a pretty complicated business, and on how to behave under water. How to descend and come up. How to control one's air, and avoid such perils to the diver as 'caisson disease,' asphyxia, or 'CO<sub>2</sub> poisoning,' drowning, and hæmorrhage. How to

deal with various emergencies other than disease when under water, such as attacks by shark or octopus, and so on.

In these days some of the divers are taught at Whale Island, where they have a huge tank into which practice descents are first made. But in my time there was nothing of this kind at all, and one took one's first taste of the ocean depths at Sheerness.

The medical regulations in regard to a diver's fitness were—and still are—extremely strict. As soon as I got back to Chatham as a learner-diver I was taken before the M.O. as a volunteer for diver, and given about the strictest overhauling I have ever experienced!

Lungs and heart had to be absolutely sound, nerves good, no excess fat, and so on—in fact one had to be pretty well a perfect specimen physically. I passed without difficulty. In addition to that a diver has to be under constant medical supervision, and is examined by the doctor every time he goes down, before donning his diving dress.

Altogether, the lessons in theory rather put the wind up me. There seemed to be so many dangers and pitfalls that it seemed difficult to imagine how a diver could survive for more than a few months at the longest.

However, I was not of the type that, having once set his hand to the plough, readily takes it off again. I had volunteered to be a diver, and a diver I was going to be.

The others were not all like that, however. We had one fellow who had rather a bad time in getting fit. He had to have several teeth seen to, and some excess fat removed and a little liver trouble corrected—mostly by exercise and purging.

But when it came to making his first descent he definitely struck. He was, by the way, a Lancashire lad.

“Noa, by goom!” said he, inspecting the water into which he was supposed to descend. “Dom it, tha’ve lugged most o’ ma teeth out, poisoned ma belly, an’ now tha’ wants to drownd me. Ah’ve had enoof—ah’m goin’ hoam!”

Needless to mention he did not go home. They just put him through the hoop and, I believe, made a good diver of him eventually.

Then there was another fellow who actually made his first descent without protest, but when he came up announced that he was through.

“Why, what’s the matter with it?” they asked him.

“Tell you what,” said he. “I’ve always been a good workman, as anyone will tell you. But if I’m going to work, I’ve got to spit on my hands from time to time, and how the hell can I do that down there in all that water?”

I am not likely to forget my own first descent into the depths. It took place at Sheerness, almost opposite the pier, in about four fathoms of water (about twenty-four feet), under the expert supervision of the instructor, P.O. Gomm—a huge



hairy man, who was later to win the D.C.M. for diving from submarines in the War.

I had, of course, had some opportunity for getting used to the feel of a diver's dress on land. And, for the tyro, it was a queer enough feeling, too; once the helmet was shut down on one and the front glass screwed up. It seemed to me that I was completely shut off from the rest of the world, and made me feel rather as though some malignant fairy had suddenly changed me into an oyster, or some other crustacean.

But that was nothing to what it felt like when it came to going down below. With enormous weights hung on back and chest, and with huge leaden-soled boots on my feet, I felt like nothing on earth, and, of course, I had to be assisted to the ladder, since I found it quite impossible to walk even a yard alone thus arrayed. A horrible feeling of isolation from my fellow-men had hold of me, and as I got my feet on the rungs of the ladder I gave a despairing glance at my grinning comrades, having a sort of feeling that I should never see them again. Never, never had they seemed so dear to me as then . . . !

My last careful instructions, given me by P.O. Gomm before he himself went down to receive me below rang in my ears. How to descend first the ladder, and after that the shot-rope (the 'shot-rope' is the diver's normal means of descent (and ascent) to the depths after he has left the short iron ladder attached to the boat. It consists of a brown hempen rope about three inches thick, to which is spliced a half-hundredweight sinker). How to send and receive signals by means of tugs on the breast-rope (sometimes called by amateurs 'the life-line') and so on. . . .

Yes, I had it all off pat.

"All right?" says the attendant.

Queer thing, about these attendants. They have to dress and undress you in your diving-rig. Like having a ladies' maid—and for sailors, too . . . !

"Yes. All right . . . !"

Some hesitancy about that statement. As a matter of fact I feel far from all right! A cold sense of despair grips at my heart (or my liver, not sure which) as the front glass is screwed on. . . . Completely cut off from the human world, now . . . ! A buzzing in my ears, and then a *tick-tock* . . . *tick-tock*, like the ticking of a gigantic clock beside me. . . .

I realize that it is the sound of the air-pump—and they're motioning me to descend the ladder.

I obey.

A strange sensation of lightness as I get down into the water, and the enormous weight I am carrying is counteracted by the pressure. But oh, a most horrible feeling of slowly descending into one's own grave . . . ! A deadly chilling feeling, and the light of day slowly fading out. . . .

Now, where's that confounded shot-rope. Ah, here it is. . . . Seems to be jerking and sort of undulating as I grip it nervously—almost as though the damn' thing was alive, or something had got hold of the other end . . . ! Heavens, there must be all sorts of horrid things down there that could get hold of the end of it, too . . . ! Supposing I went down into the jaws of some great submarine beast . . . ! What nonsense—quite impossible here, within sight of land, as it were . . . !

Down the rope—steady does it. . . . But I'm nervous, and not so steady after all. As I get lower there's a horrible buzzing in my ears, which changes to a pain—a very definite pain. . . . Pain in my nose, too, and a nasty feeling that my head might burst at any moment. Lights before my eyes . . . am I going to pass out . . . ? Hell, I mustn't do that, first time down. Got to show them I can stand the racket, anyway. . . .

Going down too fast, but can't stop myself! Hands so cold I can't feel them. . . . Going down with a run, now . . . !

Hullo, here's the bottom, and with a bump, too! My frozen, nerveless hands detach themselves from the shot-rope somehow. I am giddy, and something seems to be pushing or pulling me. I sit down with a wallop on the muddy bottom, and stare stupidly about me. It occurs to me that a fish out of water may suffer quite a lot, but not half so much as a human being alone *under* water . . . !

Sitting there, like a goop, I stare around me, trying to get some idea of this brave, new world. Not so new, though—or so brave! There is a sort of weird, green light, and I can dimly see queer shapes about me. A great rock, covered with green weed. An old tin or two. A boot sticking out of the mud. . . .

It came to me that I couldn't go on sitting there. I must find my underwater legs and get around, somehow! I was just making an effort to get to my feet when I perceived some movement on my left. Clumsily bending, I managed to get a glimpse of it—a huge, misshapen limb, with what looked like a claw on the end of it, was moving forward,

extending itself to my front close on my left side. Then, to my horror, I saw that another similar thing was doing the same on my right side. I visualized them as the claws or tentacles of some horrid sea-monster, and commenced to struggle frantically to my feet, with my heart going sixteen to the dozen.

I remembered how I had been adjured never to get in a panic while under water—that way, they told me, madness lies! But, damn it, one couldn't stand for this. I tried to turn and look behind me, —quite impossible.

Anyway, I was churning up the mud so much in my struggle that the water was like pea-soup, and I could hardly see a thing.

But I could see those two fat tentacles closing round my body, and a moment later I felt their pressure, pulling me backward and upward. . . . I don't think I have ever, before or since, felt such a nightmare sensation. It was rendered all the more nightmarish because, for all that I was trying to struggle frantically, my movements were like those of a figure in a slow-motion picture on the cinema screen.

The pressure around my body tightened, and now I could feel the foul body of the thing pressing against my back. . . . Heavens! It meant to crush me—and then, I supposed, to devour me at its leisure . . . !

I nearly cracked my own ear-drums with the yell I let out inside my helmet. The mud I had stirred up now made seeing impossible. Striving bravely to keep my head, I remember the code of signals. I was not entirely cut off from human intercourse, after all.

Somehow I got my hands up and got a grip on my air tube. I wanted to signal them to haul me up (four pulls), but I couldn't remember the correct number. So I left it at two, which meant 'more air!'

And, almost simultaneously, I remembered another thing I had been told to do in moments of great emergency. I closed the outlet-valve in my helmet. This, and my mistaken signal for more air actually did the trick. My diving-dress suddenly blew out, like a gigantic bull-frog's skin, and then the pressure of air, pulling me upwards, tore me out of my attacker's grip, and I shot up to the surface . . . !

Ye gods, how glorious was the colour of daylight, thus seen once more through the glass of my helmet. And how wonderful to see the sky—only—why should it be straight in front of me, instead of above my head?

Then I realized that I was lying on my back in the water, with my costume blown out like a huge balloon—a most demoralizing and humiliating position. . . .

I was hauled to the boat by my breast-line, like a log of wood. They opened my valve, and dug fingers under the tight elastic wrist-bands, so that the air came sputtering out with a noise that sounded very much like a rather candid criticism of my first performance as a diver!

I was deflated, and they unscrewed the front glass of my helmet.

"What is it, Bruce? What happened down there . . . ?"

Someone said :

"Crikey, he don't half look bad! Better get his helmet off . . . !"

I felt bad, too. What with the fright below, the too-rapid rise to the surface, the pain in nose and ears, and the agony of my frozen hands, I was pretty nearly all in!

When I felt better:

"What was it?" they asked me again. "What happened down there? What got you, Bruce . . .?"

"I don't know what it was—some hellish great animal, or fish, or something. It got its claws round me and tried to crush me . . .!"

Somebody was talking into a telephone, to a diver still below. He broke off into a sudden shout of laughter:

"Why, you silly young So-and-so, that was P.O. Gomm, the instructor, trying to pull you on to your feet because you were sitting down. You ought to hear what he's calling you through this phone . . .!"

They immediately started to put my helmet on once more:

"Come on—down you go again—and lively, too . . .!"

I went down again without a murmur—but I think it was one of the bravest things I ever did in my life! Incidentally, it was a long time before I heard the last of that episode.

I went on with my instruction. After that first time my fear of the depths ceased, and I learned how to control my air supply, and to rise and descend slowly enough to avoid the acute pains in ear and nose which I had suffered from at first.

The depths were increased gradually. I was sent down with a hack-saw and a tenon-saw, and taught how to saw both wood and metal under water—a

rather comic business, in its way—though I've known moments when it's been far from comic, as I shall relate in due course.

All sorts of practice tests. Iron plates to have holes drilled in them—bars and chains to be filed or cut with the hack-saw—baulks of timber to be sawn through.

Taught how to find your location below. That's a funny process—the point being that by the time you reach the bottom you haven't the slightest notion how you stand in relation to the man looking after you up above. Thus, he may signal you to go to the right—but, owing to the fact that you have turned about a good deal since you left the surface, *his* right is no longer *yours*, and so on.

One of the methods of teaching this is to sling a length of chain into the sea, then pull some distance away, and send you down to find it.

The fellow above guides you by signals—'Left. Right. Half-left. Straight ahead,' and so on. The chain has to be found, and brought up in good order, and a favourite practical joke to play on the finder is to tie a couple of knots in it. You would be surprised how difficult it is to get knots out of a chain under water!

Taught how to keep one's hands as warm as possible; how to use the muscles under water so as to keep the circulation moving, and so on. Getting almost as familiar with the bottom of the sea as with Oxford High Street.

Making the deepest dive of all in what is known as 'The Black Hole' just off Margate. Eighteen fathoms.

Complimented by P.O. Gomm, at the finish. It seems one has learned aptly, and taken to diving,

as he puts it, ' like a duck takes to water '—only rather more so !

And so, after three months' pretty intensive training, I go back to H.M.S. *Hogue*—a passed-out diver !



## CHAPTER VI

### SOME DETAILS OF THE DIVER

PERHAPS it would be as well if I pause here to interpolate a few details about the equipment, and so on, of a naval diver. It may be of some assistance to the reader in following more clearly some of the adventures I shall have to relate.

To commence with, then, the diving dress itself is made of pure sheet india-rubber, covered on both sides with stout, tanned twill. It is equipped with a sort of double collar, one part of which pulls up round the neck, while the other, the outer one, is made of vulcanized rubber, and goes over the metal breast-plate, so as to form a water-tight joint. The cuffs, too, are of vulcanized rubber, and fit very tightly to the wrists. They are further secured by rubber rings, making them completely water-tight over the wrists while leaving the hands free.

The breast-plate (sometimes called the corselet) is manufactured of tinned copper with a double outer edge, and a half-dozen stout screw-studs at even intervals. These are for fastening the corselet to the neck of the diving dress itself. The corselet also has an interrupted thread, by which the helmet is attached.

The helmet is likewise of stout tinned copper, and is equipped with three 'windows' (or holes covered by stout glass), two at the sides and one in the front. The side ones are oval in shape, and are

protected by brass bars. The one in front has no bars, and can be screwed on and off easily at will. The helmet is fitted with an interrupted thread to match that on the neck of the breast-plate, so that it can be screwed on by a mere one-eighth of a turn to the right. A patent device prevents it becoming unscrewed in any way while the diver is under water.

A diver's boots are amazing-looking things. They are enormously large, and are built of very stout leather, with thick wooden soles and large brass toe-caps. They look rather like nightmare boots to the uninitiated. To the wooden soles thick leaden soles are riveted, designed to help weight the diver down and to keep him upright when under water. The boots, together, weigh about thirty-six pounds.

When the diver is dressed, leaden weights are hung over the front and back of his breast-plate. But for these weights he would be so light that, while air was being pumped into him, he wouldn't be able to sink at all—or even if he did, he would drift about the ocean-bed like a bit of sea-weed, at the mercy of any tide or current. (At a later time I shall have a little tale to tell of what happens when a diver loses even one of his weights!) These chest and back weights weigh about forty pounds each.

The helmet and corselet in themselves are so heavy that the diver has to wear thick shoulder-pads to protect his shoulders from their weight.

On occasions a diver also wears a belt, which is weighted with slabs of lead, and weighs altogether about forty pounds. So the diver is well-weighted before he goes under water, and it is small wonder that he has difficulty in walking by himself when out of the water.

When doing particularly rough work, the diver is equipped with an overall dress of stout canvas, made to fasten at the back, and containing a couple of huge pockets in which tools, etc., may be carried.

Inside every diver's helmet there is a telephone apparatus, but for some reason this is not at all popular with divers as a means of communication with their attendant above. They almost invariably prefer to use the breast-rope or air-tube for signalling, for which there is, of course, a recognized code, one pull meaning: '*I am all right*,' two pulls: '*Send me a slate*,' and so on.

The under-sea diver's telephone is, however, quite an ingenious instrument. There is a transmitter to the right of the diver's helmet, and a receiver in the crown. There is also a bell-push, which the diver works with his chin.

In deeper waters the diver also carries a lamp, which is, however, usually considered to be of no great use. He therefore usually contents himself with feeling his way around, at which he soon becomes very expert.

Now as to the matter of air-supply. I suppose most people are familiar with the appearance of a diving-pump, which is a sort of upright box with a couple of fly-wheels, one or both of which is provided with a handle. Inside the box are a couple of pistons, each capable of providing about one tenth of a cubic foot of free air per revolution.

The air is conveyed to the diver through a rubber tube, and enters the helmet by what is known as the 'inlet valve' which lets air in, but not out again. Surplus and foul air is got rid of by means of the 'outlet valve' which is fixed to the helmet just behind the diver's right ear.

The outlet valve has a tap by which it can be stopped from working, and when this happens, if air is still being pumped down to the diver, his dress immediately becomes inflated, so that he is automatically borne to the surface in double quick time.

The diver can also regulate the outlet valve so that his suit becomes partly inflated and he can bounce along the bottom of the sea like a rubber ball. This device is sometimes used on a very muddy bottom, to avoid stirring up the mud too much.

## CHAPTER VII

### A DIVER'S WARDROBE

A WHOLE-LENGTH book could quite easily be written on the subject of the technique of diving—in fact several have. The official diving manual of the Navy itself runs into nearly a hundred pages of close type, with numerous diagrams and illustrations.

While I am keeping these details as brief as possible so as not to bore the reader, I think a few words on the dressing of the diver may be of interest, for I have found that the general public know actually very little about it.

The diver is like the lady of fashion in one respect—he cannot and does not dress himself for his excursions to the sea-bottom. He has always at least two attendants to assist him, and these men are also, in part, responsible for his safety and welfare.

Believe me, the ceremony of dressing the diver is almost as elaborate as that of dressing the bride!

First the diver strips, either completely or to singlet, and possibly shorts. Then, assisted by his attendant, he dons a thick woollen guernsey, and a pair of woollen drawers, and long, thick stockings. Should the weather and the water be cold, he sometimes wears over these one, or even two, suits of

flannels. A cap of red wool is then adjusted over his head. This has to be done with meticulous care, lest his air supply should be in any way obstructed.

Then the shoulder-pads, designed to protect his shoulders from the weight, or from any chafing from his heavy breast-plate and helmet.

Next comes the diving-suit. This is usually warmed before he puts it on, as the cold rubber is likely to strike a chill to his body which, once he is dressed and under water, he will have some difficulty in getting rid of.

It requires two assistants to help him into this. They hold it open for him while he climbs into it, and they ease it over his shoulder-pads. Next comes the toughest job—forcing his hands through the tremendously tight cuffs. These are usually so tight that it is necessary for him to grease his hands with soft soap, and then, keeping the fingers straight and narrowing the palm as much as possible, by dint of hard pushing he gets them through.

Next the diver takes a seat, facing the pump, while his attendants put on his boots, and then adjust breast-plate and helmet. The greatest care has to be taken over these processes, because, for instance, if the boots are not properly secured, they might easily be sucked off his feet on a muddy bottom (I've a story to tell about that, later), and if the helmet is not properly fixed, it might come unscrewed—and if that happens it's all up with the unfortunate diver!

That, as a matter of fact, is to my mind one of the great snags about diving—one has to rely so much on others—a thing I never did fancy.

When the helmet is put on the front glass is left out, so that the diver can still talk to his attendants. He usually talks quite a lot too—knowing full well that in a short time he will be more or less completely cut off from human society for a time. For my part I have never quite got over that sense of isolation which comes over one when the front glass is first screwed on, and I don't believe most divers ever do.

Next the air-tube is carefully passed under the right arm, and the end attached to the inlet-valve. Then the breast-line is brought up under the left arm in the same way, and secured.

Next come the belt and knife. The knife, by the way, is a very important part of the diver's outfit, and must always be worn on the left side. It is a heavy weapon, always kept very sharp, and is carried in a copper or brass sheath. Very often the diver's very life depends on the efficacy of this weapon.

Sometimes the breast and back weights are put on while the diver sits there, but usually they are left until he is actually standing upon the iron ladder at the stern of the boat. And finally, when he is half-submerged, the front glass is screwed into place. A moment of complete silence—unpleasantly like what one would imagine the silence of the grave to be like—and then comes the loud *tick-tock, tick-tock*, as the attendant at the pump commences to turn the handle and pump air to him.

The diver then descends until his helmet is under water, when he tests his outlet valve, and the attendant leans over and takes a last look at everything to see that it is all correct. When he has satisfied himself of this, he pats the top of the diver's

helmet with his hand, as a signal that all is well and the diver can descend.

The diver goes down a step or two. Above him, in the boat, one attendant is standing by the air-tube, paying it out and keeping it reasonably taut, so that the air shall not be obstructed in its passage, while another one attends to the breast-line.

So the diver goes down, and thereafter is indicated to his faithful attendants above only by a line of bubbles coming up from the depths of the ocean!

If it should be necessary to guide the movements of the diver from above, the attendant, as soon as he knows the diver has reached bottom, signals to him to 'go left.' As, by this time, the diver has lost all sense of location, he very often moves in some quite different direction—*his* left, of course, varying according to his position when he reaches the bottom. The attendant adjusts this by signalling down various moves until he gets him in the same position as himself, after which his guidance is, of course, a simple matter.

All the time the diver is below the attendants must be continually on the alert. Usually at least one of them is himself a trained diver, and by the various signs he can observe in the bubbles, the movements of tube and breast-line, and so on, he is usually aware of what is happening below, and is all ready to render what assistance he can in case of any emergency.

When the diver comes up again the first thing to do is to remove his front glass, thus re-establishing his direct contact with the outer world once more. Then, if he has finished work for the time being,



his dress is removed, helmet first, then boots and belt, corselet, and the rest of his rig.

So there you have, in a nutshell, what might be described as 'the inside-dope on the diver's boudoir !'

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WORLD BENEATH THE OCEAN

ONE of the commonest dangers to which the diver is exposed is known as 'caisson disease,' or 'compressed air illness.' This is caused usually by the diver coming to the surface too quickly, and so passing too rapidly from compressed-air pressure to normal conditions. The result of this is the liberation of air bubbles in the blood or tissue.

The trouble about this distressing (and often fatal) complaint is that the symptoms never occur until some time after the diver has reached the surface. The usual symptoms are faintness, or loss of consciousness; paralysis, or partial paralysis of limbs, etc.; bad pains in chest or stomach; giddiness, or affections of sight or hearing, and pain in arms or legs.

There are two methods of dealing with this trouble. The best of these is to put the patient straightaway into what is known as a 'decompression chamber'—a sort of 'iron-lung.'

Immediately he is put in the chamber it is sealed, and compressed air pumped into it to bring it to the same level of pressure as that in which the diver has been working. The pressure is then gradually reduced, bit by bit, until the symptoms disappear.

There are now, I believe, decompression chambers in every depot where there are divers, and

sometimes aboard ships as well. But in my day there were far fewer of them, and the method used then—which can still be adopted to-day where no decompression chamber is available—was simply to put the patient back in his diving-dress and take him below again to the same depth as that at which he was last working, and then bring him gradually to the surface once more.

Another common danger to the diver is what is known as 'CO<sub>2</sub> poisoning,' or asphyxia, due to an attenuated air supply, or too much foul air in the helmet. In other words, lack of oxygen.

This happens when a diver is below, and will sometimes bring on unconsciousness with little or no warning. The cure is to bring him part of the way to the surface—if brought right up too quickly he would, of course, run a grave risk of contracting caisson disease. Relieved of the pressure, and with more air pumped into his helmet, he will usually soon recover. Occasionally it is necessary to bring him right up to the surface, and apply artificial respiration.

A third danger is—from drowning! This sounds strange, but it can be caused by either an accidental cut or tear in the diving-dress, whereby the water can enter, or, as has happened very rarely, through the helmet coming unscrewed owing to the safety-catch not having been properly adjusted.

The fourth common danger is hæmorrhage. This is usually much less serious than the others and is caused either through trouble in the diver's eustachian tubes plus air-pressure, or through a knock or fall. Here again the biggest danger is that of caisson disease through bringing the diver too quickly to the surface.

These are what may be described as the dangers to the diver from *within*—those from without are far more frequent and varied !

They will appear from time to time in the course of this narrative and so need not be enumerated here. Instead I would like to say a few words, without any too strong a regard for chronology, on what I call the 'queer side' of a diver's life—and, of course, by a diver's life I mean his life below water.

For from the moment the helmet of the diver disappears under the surface he is in a new world. It is a world of loneliness and almost complete isolation. A world in which he is immediately robbed of at least two of his senses—hearing and smell. A world in which many of the natural laws by which he lives in the air are altered or even reversed.

For instance, in the air, if a man sees an object, either moving or static, and wants to get hold of it, he moves towards it, naturally. But the diver who does that under water is due for a disappointment, for the object, unless it happens to be anchored or rooted to the bottom, will elude his grasp every time ! If he wants to get hold of it, what he must do is to *move backwards and away from it*, when it will immediately follow straight into his grasp !

The reason for this is, of course, the displacement of water caused by the diver's movement, and you can demonstrate this quite well if you put a match-stick, say, in a bath of water and then try to catch hold of it by moving your hand towards it through the water.

Another queer thing about life under water is that while, in the air, you can only fall one way,

i.e. downwards—under water you can fall *two*—downwards and upwards: Thus if through the fouling of the outlet valve, or for some other reason, the diver's dress becomes too full of air, he will immediately rise towards the surface. It is even more unpleasant if for some reason (and it happens at times) the lower part of his dress gets the inflation and not the upper—for in this case he will suddenly find himself reversed, with his head down and his feet up—a decidedly embarrassing and uncomfortable situation to be in.

Then there is the question of keeping your balance. Up above, in the world of earth and air, this is comparatively easy, but down in the depths there are several things that can quite easily destroy your balance to your definite discomfort.

There are, for instance, currents—which may be likened to the winds up above. But whereas the winds blow comparatively evenly, and exert all their pressure in one and the same direction, down below it has been known for an unfortunate diver to find himself with a powerful current pushing his head and torso one way and another forcing his legs in a totally different one.

Also the winds of the earth blow only one at a time, nor do they change suddenly—at any rate not instantaneously. But the currents of the sea work in regiments and hosts, and one second you may find yourself being pushed one way, and the next another. All this is very disconcerting to the tyro, and takes a lot of getting used to.

Then there is the matter of light. Visibility rapidly decreases as the diver descends, and in a very few fathoms' depth he is liable to find himself in complete darkness. He is equipped with

a lamp, but in a general way the average diver is not fond of using it. It has a number of drawbacks, not the least of which is the number of fish it attracts to the spot. Fish, though comparatively small and quite harmless, can be a considerable nuisance to the diver—but more of this anon.

So the diver comes to rely very largely on his sense of feeling, although in certain waters he has a fine natural assistance supplied him which is lacking in the world of air: phosphorescence. There are times when it is possible, by moving one hand quickly backwards and forwards in the water, to create enough phosphorescence to see by!

While on the subject of visibility: another handicap existing in the underworld of water is the very prevalent one of mud. The mud on the ocean bed approximates, I suppose, to the dust of the upper world. And also to the fog.

But it is, actually, far more troublesome than either. The slightest movement in the mud causes trouble. If the diver is working in the pale, greenish-brownish light of the shallows, and if he is walking in mud, he has to be very careful to tone down his movements so that the discoloration arising from the stirred-up mud shall not rise as high as his helmet. If it does he is worse off than a landsman in a thick fog, for the brown, cloudy discoloration of the disturbed mud is impenetrable even to the rays of the strongest lamp. I have sometimes been working in mud when, even using the greatest care, I have not seen anything below my waist from the moment I got down to the moment I went up again. This may not sound very much to the individual ignorant of conditions on the sea-bottom, but when one knows something of the snags and pitfalls, both

animate and inanimate, that lurk there, it can be a trifle hair-raising !

In mentioning balance below the waves just now, I forgot a very important point. 'The man in the air-world, who happens to weigh a pound heavier one side than the other, does not experience any material discomfort therefrom. But in the depths it is quite different. A matter of a pound or so extra weight on one side or the other will cause a most embarrassing feeling of lopsidedness. More particularly is this the case when it reaches below a certain level of lightness. Elsewhere in this book will be found an account of how the loss of eighteen pounds or so from one of my feet came near to ending my career as a diver—or as anything else, except, perhaps, an angel !

And then, of course, one comes to the natives, so to speak : the natural, living denizens of the deep. Some of these, such as sharks, octopi, moro-eels and others of the larger and more savage variety, can be—and frequently are—really dangerous. In most accounts of the experiences of deep-sea divers the shark and the octopus play prominent parts as the enemy of the intruder into their domains. I have had, as you will learn later in their right places, encounters with many of them, and in my opinion, although as will be seen I have had some near squeaks, the hazards from such creatures are often exaggerated.

The most ferocious and dangerous fish I have ever encountered (and I have to admit that it put the wind right up me, as the saying goes) was a cod : just a cod—the sort of fellow you devour at your dinner tables with mashed potatoes and parsley-sauce. Only this chap happened to be, at a rough

estimate, some twenty feet long and had a mouth and a set of teeth that would have made the average crocodile look silly !

He came on me out of the blue, as it were, when I was doing some work on the bottom off Invergordon, in Scotland. I saw what looked like a great blue-grey shadow sliding swiftly and silently through the water, and I said to myself, in some dismay : ' Good Lord, it's a shark—and a whopper, too ! ' And I slipped my hand down and drew my knife.

It wouldn't have been the first time I had tackled a big shark, and at the moment I felt no more emotion than a trifle of annoyance at being disturbed at my work.

The great fish saw me, came to a halt, and then swung slowly round to regard me. It had, of course, been attracted by the dull glitter of my helmet with its copper, and its glass windows. Divers are, at all times, matters of considerable curiosity to most fishes.

And it was then, when I stood face to face with the monster, that my emotion suddenly changed and annoyance gave place to very definite fear.

It was the biggest cod I had ever seen, and knowing what I knew about the viciousness and tiger-like ferocity of the cod (weight for age the shark has nothing on him at all as a sheer savage) I had a nasty feeling that my number might very well be up if he really got going. For I knew that I and my knife would stand very little chance against the size, strength, and ferocity of that monster of the deep !

So there I stood in the mud, ankle deep, and just stared at the great fish like a goof, with no movement about me at all except that my heart was pounding away like an express sledge-hammer, and,



inside my helmet, sounded in my ears just like one.

In the end it was probably my funk that saved me. For I was too frightened to move, and, after a few moments (as I suppose, though at the time it seemed like hours, you may guess) of steady regard with his goggle eyes, what time he opened and shut his great mouth several times, giving me a display of teeth that a chorus-girl might have envied, but that made me shudder, the monster gave a quick flirt of his huge tail, and was off once more.

The relief was enormous, but I may say that I didn't feel too comfortable during the rest of my spell 'below,' and did my work with one eye on the look out for the return of the big fellow, or, possibly, of one of his mates of similar size.

As a matter of fact I had experienced my last comfortable moment on that job, for there is a sequel to the story of the cod—or perhaps I should say a continuation of it—which I will recount, because it may give my readers some idea of how weird and gruesome a diver's job can sometimes be.

I was ashore that evening, and in one of the local hostelrys, talking to an old longshoreman, I told the story of the great cod, hardly, I may say, expecting to be believed.

But to my surprise the old man just nodded, sombrely, and said :

“ Aye, you'll find big cod in these waters nowadays, though I've never heard tell of one so big as that. But ye wouldn't get him in the nets, a chap that size—he'd break away for sure. But big cod there are—and big cod there will be, for many a long day—and small wonder ! ”

I was curious.

"Why?" I asked him. "What do you mean? How do you account for it, then?"

He looked at me in surprise, and then said (I am not reproducing his accent, by the way):

"Why? Why is it that always in some parts ye will find bigger cod, crab, lobster, and conger than in other parts? *Corpses*. . . ! That's what they grow big and fatten on—corpses! And no doubt ye'll recall what happened here in the early days o' the War?"

"Why, no," I had to admit, "what was it?"

"Ah!" he replied. "It may well be that ye were too busy yourself in those days to note much, but I doubt ye'll have heard of it, sometime. If ye go to the kirk o'er yonder, ye'll find a tablet set in the wall there—a tablet to commemorate the three hundred and fifty odd women and children who met their deaths just out there, where ye saw yon cod!"

"Good God!" I exclaimed, almost tempted to disbelieve him. "How did that happen?"

He looked at me.

"Ye'll not have seen her, then?"

"Seen what?"

"All that is left of a proud ship—H.M.S. *Natal*. A battle-cruiser, she was, and she came here in her glory and her might, with her flags flying and her band playing. And a great fuss did the folk hereabouts make of the brave sailors that were fighting for their homes—and right enough it was, too. Yet vanity is a dangerous thing, my friend, and maybe it was the judgment o' the Lord that descended upon them—though if that was so I'll venture to say that the punishment was too severe for the sin. However,

be that as it may, there was great times aboard H.M.S. *Natal* while she lay there. Dances and what not. And then, one day, they give one o' these cinema shows, especially for the bairns, and there was three hunderd and fifty o' the mites there, with, o' course, a good sprinkling o' mothers and aunties and what not. And then, right in the middle of the show, there came a mighty explosion. The ship blew up, and in far less time than I'm taking to tell ye, she had gone to the bottom, with no more than a handful saved, and most all the wee mites and their guardians drowned like kittens in a sack, God help them . . . !”

I could see that, even after all the years, the old man was much moved at the thought of the disaster—and I may say that I was myself—and full of horror, too, when I thought of that cod, and what had made him so big !

The old man seemed to read my thoughts, for he went on, sombrely :

“ Worked hard to get at the bodies they did, and a lot were recovered from where the poor old *Natal* lay, as she lies to-day, on the bottom with her keel up. Then the order came that no more could be got up—the rest would just have to stay, until they gradually decomposed. And so it was. And so it is that the crab and the conger and the cod in these parts are big and strong . . . !”

I left him, feeling rather sick. I learned later more of the story of the ill-fated *Natal* blown up at her moorings, presumably by enemy sabotage—the theory being that time-bombs were concealed amongst the coal in her bunkers. But I don't think that was ever definitely proved, either in her case or in that of her companions in misfortune, the

*Bulwark* and the *Princess Irene*, both sunk in similar circumstances off Sheerness.

What I do know for certain is that never after that did I have one comfortable moment while working under water off Invergordon! It always seemed to me that the depths were haunted by the sad ghosts of those poor, unfortunate women and children. Some of you might find it an unpleasant experience to have to work or watch in a haunted house. Maybe—but try working in a haunted sea, fathoms below the surface, isolated from all your fellow humans, except for occasional jerks on a piece of rope, in a dull, greeny brown light, that makes everything look unreal and unnatural in any case, and see how you'll like that!

For a time, therefore, I was working in what might have been the shadow, had she possessed one there under water, of the ill-fated *Natal* herself, and there the ghosts seemed to throng thickly. I could feel the touch of tiny, cold hands on mine, and little voices whispered into my ears . . . Maybe I'm a sentimental fool—but I can tell you it was far from pleasant.

One hears—and some of us, including myself, have had practical experience of it—of the emotions which tear the breast of a sailor as he sees a gallant ship take her last plunge beneath the waves. Certainly it is one of the saddest, most poignant sights in the world.

But there is one worse!

To see a ship that has once bravely ridden the waves, gallantly flinging defiance at the elements which are her natural and constant enemies, lying helpless, rusted and rotting, in the mud of the ocean depths, with the weed and the barnacles crusting

her once-stout sides, and her cabins a home for the nastier and more furtive creatures of the deep . . . That I believe to be the saddest sight of the whole maritime world.

And it is one I have seen many times. Once I went down in Scapa Flow, and walked along submarine streets formed of the towering, rusted sides of the once proud German Fleet. It was enough to break the heart of any sailor, enemy ships or not!

I mentioned awhile ago, I think, how the diver invariably excites the curiosity of almost all fish. Now, I should say that the fish in the sea approximate, in some degree, to the birds of the air. But there is this difference. When you are walking about on dry land the birds never come clustering round you, or settling on your hat, or getting in front of your eyes, so that your vision is obscured.

But one of the first startling experiences of the learner-diver, when he makes his maiden 'dip,' is the way the fishes swarm round his helmet, with their noses right against the glass of his windows very often, and often, too, making a soft *tap-tapping* with their bodies against the copper of the helmet. Sometimes they swarm so thickly that one cannot properly see what one is doing, and has to frighten them away by making grabs at them with the hands. But even then they don't stay away for long, or else fresh ones take their places. The small fry of the deep sea—and some of the larger chaps, too—are, on the whole, saucy and daring little beggars.

Nor is it always entirely safe to grab at them. I recall that once, when working in tropical waters, I was being well and truly pestered by a perfect

swarm of fish, for the most part myriad-coloured, fairy-like creatures, but a pest for all that. Amongst them were several greyish, colourless creatures, with large heads and long, flat tails covered by kinds of feathery appendages. These were particularly pestilential, and at last, after several attempts, I managed to grab one.

I immediately wished most heartily that I hadn't! For the moment that I touched the brute it was as though a flash of blue lightning blazed into my eyes, and that phenomenon was accompanied by a sensation as though someone had suddenly run a long, strong needle right up my spinal column, from base to apex! And for quite a time afterwards my right arm was numbed from the elbow downwards, so that I had difficulty in doing my work properly.

I don't know what the creature was, but he certainly, like the electric-eel, carried a charge of electricity about with him which made it definitely unwise to handle him!

But most of the fish, especially those in tropic waters, are very beautiful indeed. There are strange looking fellows—I fancy they call them sun-fish—who blow themselves out like balloons on the approach of an enemy, and then deflate to their quite modest normal size as soon as the danger has passed. Others have the power of changing their colour instantaneously in the most amazing manner, which savours almost of magic.

Indeed, there is much to be found at the bottom of the sea that appears to be magical—though not all of it is as charming and delightful as the fish I have been describing.

Well, I seem to have spent a lot of time generaliz-

ing about the diver's life, so that I expect some of my readers will be saying : ' Well, the chap talks a lot about diving, but when the deuce is he going to *do* some ? '

So here goes . . . !

## CHAPTER IX

### A DIVER'S JOB

MARCH 1911, and I was faced with my first big diving job. An up-to-date battleship, H.M.S. *Vengeance*, had fouled a length of thick wire with one of her screws, and it had wound round the shaft like cotton on a reel.

Together with other divers, I went down on a visit of inspection. We had a good look at the trouble, and reluctantly came to the conclusion that it would be necessary to remove the rope-guards, each weighing about a hundredweight, which were secured to the cone of the propeller-shaft by very large bolts.

We came to this conclusion reluctantly, because the month was March, and it was a cold one at that. We knew that our little job wasn't going to be any sort of picnic.

Some of you motorists grumble a bit when you have to unscrew a few nuts on the open road with nice thick gloves on to keep the cold out. Try to imagine what it's like to shift a dozen or two outside bolts, under several fathoms of sea-water, with bare hands, on a cold March day, when an icy wind is chilling the water to about Arctic temperature !

We were working on a staging, sunk in the water around the ship's stern. At last, after several hours' work (we kept going up and down in shifts, of



course) we got the nuts undone and the guards were removed, shackled to a rope's end.

Up went the guards, and next moment—off came the wire. It came off with all the force of a strained coil-spring, and it caught me unawares.

Next moment I was knocked clear of the stage and falling with a *plonk* to the ocean bed. The uninitiated may imagine that falling through the water is nothing much to worry about, but the *Manual of Diving* teaches one otherwise. There is, as a matter of fact, in falling as I did, in shallow water, a considerable risk of breaking a rib, or a rupture of the stomach.

As it was, from one point of view what happened to me was a good deal worse—for I landed slap in the middle of a mud-hole, and before I knew what had happened I was in up to my waist, and sinking fast!

An attempt to struggle only made me sink deeper, and stirred up the mud so that I was plunged into complete darkness. By this time I was up to the elbows in the thick, sticky slime, and my arms seemed to be imprisoned to my sides. It was certainly one of the most unpleasant experiences I have ever encountered.

I remembered, however, the rule that one must never panic, and I forced myself to keep cool and to reason out what was the best thing to be done. At last, while still slowly sinking down into that submarine bog, I managed to get my right arm free. I reached up for my air tube, and signalled first 'more air!' and then 'haul me up!' to the boat above.

As the air came in, I closed my outlet valve, and my dress commenced to inflate, thus giving me

greater buoyancy. Up at the top they were hauling hard, and wondering what the devil had happened to me below there !

And now I experienced a most extraordinary sensation, which gave me an idea of just how the early worm feels when a couple of hungry birds have got him by the ends, and are tugging different ways.

It was a relief to feel that I was gradually being dragged clear of the mud, and at last I managed to shake off its last lingering clasp, and with a mighty *plonk*, I was free, and going up to the surface.

Once more it was a great relief and joy to see the sunlight, but, unpleasant as the experience was, it had taught me a lesson in regard to the little tricks that can be played by fouled screws ! I have cleared many dozens since that day, but I have never since been caught out that way again.

In 1912 I was transferred to the *Blenheim*, a repair-ship for destroyers. It was all work aboard her, and I scarcely ever got a minute to myself, except for eating and sleeping. When I wasn't hard at work on some job or other in the smith's shop, it was a case of diving to clear bottoms of destroyers and other small ships of barnacles, etc., or going down to the bottom to put the slings on boats that had sunk, ready for the salving lighter to haul them up to the surface once more.

We were under the command of Admiral Sir R. Arbuthnot.

From Monday to Friday, day and night, he had his fleet of destroyers on the move, and there were nearly always some ' casualties ' on hand—boats that had been badly battered by high seas, or rammed,

and it was always my job, either as blacksmith or diver, to help get them ready for sea again.

Our motto in those days was : ' Work, Sick Bay, or Cells ! ' and, on the whole, the first proved the easiest !

On one occasion it was decided that the whole of the fleet of sixteen destroyers had to have their searchlight platforms made higher. This was a colossal job, and meant, amongst other things, the making of forty-eight huge angle-irons, and enormous metal rings, five feet in diameter, to be welded.

All day and every day it seemed that the cry : ' Where's the blacksmith ? Pass the word for the blacksmith ! ' was continuous, and ' Blackie ' Brassington, whose mate I was, used to groan :

" Oh, why the bloody hell aren't I a miller—or anything but a perishing smith ? "

Incidentally, the life of a naval blacksmith is not without its dangerous side, as is exemplified, for instance, when ' tying up ship.' It is considered the blacksmith's job to secure the wire hawser in the shackle of the buoy, which is done by means of inserting a pin. This sounds pretty easy, but when the said pin weighs over a hundredweight, and a bit of clumsiness in lowering it lets it down a lot too far, it is not so easy. Added to which on such occasions everyone is shouting and yelling—except the poor devil with the pin—and confusion reigns supreme. The danger lies in the possibility of the strained wire cable snapping. If that happens it goes off with a report like that of a big gun, and the severed end comes back like an enormous spring—and if anyone gets in the way of it he's lucky if he isn't pretty well cut in half !

After a time we went off to Scotland with the

combined fleets for torpedo-practice—and then, as diver, I fell in for another nice job.

This was searching for lost torpedoes—which, for some reason, had failed to come to the surface. First, the torpedo had to be located, and in order to do this one had to lie flat on a small grating, which was then attached to a boat and towed slowly along, while one peered down into the sea to locate the torpedo. Meantime, if there was any sort of sea at all—and there generally was—the grating was awash, and one got more than a little damp while this part of the programme was in progress!

The torpedo located, one had to get into diving-kit and go down to it. The trouble usually was that the propeller of the torpedo had got jammed and the slightest movement was likely to start it up again. If your hands happened to be anywhere near it when that occurred, they would probably be sliced off with all the facility of a bacon-cutter at work!

So the first job was to adjust a guard over the propeller to prevent such an eventuality—and heaven help your hands if the screw started off while you were doing it!

The next job was to adjust a band and shackle for hoisting the torpedo to the surface, and then one gave them the signal to haul it up and hastily got clear before they started to hoist.

On the whole, after a few months of this sort of service on the *Blenheim*, I came to the conclusion that, like the policeman's, the diver's life was not a happy one.

But, in the midst of all this work we had our diversions.

For instance, when we were lying off Felixstowe, in 1912, there happened a queer, and in some ways

an amusing little incident in connection with a spare anvil. My immediate superior, the Chief Blacksmith, was one of the strangest characters I have ever encountered in the Service. He was a huge, hairy man, enormously strong, who drank like a fish, and had earned himself the title of 'the Mad Mullah' because so quick and ferocious was his temper that, if anyone roused him, he would unhesitatingly chase them all over the ship with a twelve-pound sledge, which he could handle as the average man would a tack-hammer.

What would have happened if he had ever caught one of them, heaven alone knows, and I shudder to think. Luckily he never did, the fact being that, despite his enormous strength, he was rather slow and clumsy on his feet, whereas the average sailor is agile, and a good dodger, a fact which, I think, saved at least one tragedy aboard the *Blenheim*.

Nevertheless, the smith was a man to respect, and respected he was alike by officers and men, for it was said that he would have chased the Admiral himself around the quarter-deck with his hammer had that officer offended him—and I verily believe he would have, too!

The Mullah was what they call in the Army 'an old sweat.' He knew all the ropes, and was up to all the tricks. One of his favourite ones was making a bit of money on the quiet by the sale of all sorts of scrap metal and oddments to different junk-dealers at the various ports we touched.

I, of course, was brought into the business as an accomplice and underling. Whether I liked the idea or not, I certainly wouldn't have gone against the Mullah for all the regulations in the Admiralty. For, of course, this sort of dealing was strictly

against the regulations, more especially as a good deal of the 'scrap' metal we sold from time to time was not altogether 'scrap'—until we made it so!

The man the Mullah dealt with in Felixstowe was a dealer known as 'Sheeny Sam,' and Sheeny Sam had a bad reputation throughout the Fleet as being a receiver of stolen property, and all sorts of other unsavoury things, and was never allowed aboard any of the ships in any circumstances.

So our dealings with him had to be very much *sub rosa*. Nevertheless, the Mullah insisted on doing business with him because he gave a better price than any of his local confreres.

So it happened that one afternoon as I was going ashore, the Mullah said to me:

"Hey, Bruce—just drop in at Sheeny's will you, and give him the tip that I've got some good stuff for him—including a nice little anvil in quite good condition. Better tell him to come along for it with his bleeding bumboat to-night, see?"

"Aye aye!" I responded. "What time shall I tell him to come along?"

"Oh, better say about six bells" he replied.

Six bells in this case meant six bells in the first night watch—i.e. 10.30 p.m.

So while ashore I delivered the message, and at 10.30 I was standing by, against a convenient port, for the arrival of Sheeny in what the Mullah called his 'bumboat,' which was actually a light and rather ancient skiff. The Mullah was acting as intermediary. That is to say he was on deck, keeping a look out in the blackness of the night for the skiff's approach. We had it all arranged, with an elaborate code of signals as a guide to me.

Presently I heard a voice above softly humming

'After the Ball was Over.' That was a signal that Sheeny was on the spot and waiting.

I whistled a bar of 'In the Bay of Biscay O!' which meant I was lowering away.

Then, in a couple of handy-sized sacks, I lowered the bulk of the stuff. As each lot reached the boat Sheeny would cough twice, and I would let go.

It came to the turn of the last consignment—the anvil. I didn't know where or how the Mullah had got hold of it, but I did know that the darned thing was heavy, and it was difficult to get it through the port without making a noise, and then, when it was through, I had to lower it away very slowly and carefully, in case it should bump against the side of the ship.

Owing to this I was very doubtful as to how far I had lowered it, but I was presently relieved to hear two sharp coughs, which I took to mean it had arrived safely.

So I let go the rope.

What had actually happened was that Sheeny had swallowed a choke or something and had coughed in spite of himself. The fool hadn't the sense to make it *three* coughs, which wouldn't have meant a damn' thing. But I just heard two coughs, and so I let go!

At that moment the anvil was suspended, I should say, about ten or twelve feet above the skiff, and of course, when I let go, down it went with a run!

I saw the rope whipping through the port, and tried to grasp it, but missed. Then came a sound of splintering from below, and a loud exclamation in what might have been Yiddish, or possibly Polish, but which didn't in any case sound polite.

This was followed by a lot of splashing, and then

some gruff shouting from the deck, and more splashing. I decided that things didn't look too healthy for me, anyway, so I made myself scarce and got with speed into a portion of the ship as far as possible from the scene of action.

But what actually happened was this. The heavy anvil, coming down with a run, just missed Sheeny's head, and then went plump through the bottom of his skiff. The skiff immediately filled and sank, and Sheeny was left, floundering and spluttering in the water, which was an element to which he was unaccustomed in any case.

Luckily he could swim all right, and he swam round the side of the ship until he came to the lowered companion-ladder. He got a grip on this, and then let out a feeble yell for help.

The officer of the watch, who had heard the noise, was in the vicinity.

"What the hell's this?" says he, and flashes a light on the foot of the companion. And there he sees the ugly and unmistakable countenance of Sheeny.

"What the devil d'you think you're up to?" he demands.

"Vell," wails Sheeny. "Vot you think, eh? My boat vos sunk, and I vos drowning. I must come aboard, if you please!"

"If I please be damned!" retorted the officer, who had recognized him. "You know damn' well you're not allowed aboard this ship *in any circumstances*. So just take your dirty paws off her, will you?"

"But I vos drown . . . !" wailed Sheeny.

"Drown and be damned to you!" says the officer. "The place'll smell a sight better when you've gone. But get away from here, and do your



drowning somewhere else, my man. We don't want our local water polluted . . . ! ”

“ But . . . ” wails the wretched Sheeny.

“ Oh, hell ! ” says the officer. Then, seeing someone standing by : “ Hey, you, ” he orders, “ get down that ladder and jab him in the eye with a boat-hook. Smartly now ! ”

The man standing by was the Mullah himself.

“ Aye, aye, sir ! ” says he, briskly, and down the ladder he nips. Sheeny, with a squeak of terror, lets go the ladder and starts to tread water. On the bottom step the Mullah leans over and hisses at him :

“ And if you say a word about what's happened I'll pulp your head with my hammer ! ”

Sheeny, with another moan of wretchedness, starts to swim away. As the Mullah gets back to the deck the officer demands :

“ What was that you said to him ? ”

“ I told him if he didn't get away I'd pulp his head with my hammer, sir. He knows me ! ”

“ Yes, ” says the officer, rather drily, “ I've no doubt he does ! ”

Which takes the Mullah off !

Sheeny, it seems, swam to two more ships, and each of them refused to have him aboard. He was finally picked up, half-drowned, by a picket-boat, and taken ashore. The following day the Mullah went ashore, and made the poor wretch pay up for the anvil and the scrap, arguing that we had delivered the goods as arranged, and that if Sheeny had chosen to cough at the wrong time, that was his fault, not ours. And so great was the fear in Sheeny's heart of the Mullah and his hammer, that he paid up like a lamb, albeit a rather tearful one !

I have mentioned that the Mullah drank like a

fish, and the expression has a peculiar significance for me. In addition to his heavy and varied potations ashore the Mullah liked to have a drink or two on board.

Of course, there is a very strict regulation against bringing drink on board, and constant activity on the part of the master-at-arms and his myrmidons to see that these regulations are not broken.

But for all that the Mullah got his drink aboard somehow or other. He was as wily as the gentleman whose name he bore, and as ingenious as a wagon-load of gipsies.

It wasn't long before I was to have a demonstration of his methods.

One evening I was ashore when I encountered the Mullah. He was walking along the street, solemnly carrying a large codfish, much to the amusement of a number of small boys.

"Hullo!" said I. "Been fishing?"

"*Fishing!*" he retorted, with a contemptuous expectation. "Not yet, me lad. This is only the bait!"

"Then the catch ought to be a nice one!"

"It will. But seriously, Bruce, listen! I'll be a bit late coming aboard to-night, and maybe when I do come I'll be a trifle—tired. See?"

I saw.

"Well, you'll be going aboard before me. Now, I'm going to leave this fish at the 'Crown and Anchor' and I'll tell them you're going to call for it. I'll leave a pint behind the bar for you too if you'll just take it aboard for me. You can pick it up on your way, can't you?"

And I, innocently enough, said that I could and I would,

In due course, having finished my evening's amusement, I made a final call at the 'Crown and Anchor' and picked up the fish and the pint that the Mullah had left for me.

It was the very devil of a codfish, that one (nearly as big as the one that attacked me off Invergordon), and I had to put up with a good deal of back-chat on my way back to the ship, including such remarks as :

"Wot cheer, Scott's Emulsion!"

"Blimey, look at that sardine. Wot yer done with the rest of the tin, mess-mate?"

Immediately I got on board the master-at-arms, with his eyes well skinned for liberty men smuggling booze on to the ship, made a dive at me.

"Hullo, my lad. What's that you've got?"

I had half a mind to tell him it was next year's Derby winner (surely the darned thing was big enough for him to see what it was?), but discretion prevailed. I told him it was a codfish.

Now, had I known as much then as I knew later, I might have sounded self-conscious. As it was my conscience was quite clear, and my reply had the ring of truth about it. Just a plain codfish!

"All right," said the master-at-arms. "Carry on!"

As I went below I heard a voice say :

"There you are! Who says there's no romance in the Navy? The last time that diver had a dip he fell in love with a lady cod, and now damn my eyes if he isn't taking her down to bed with him!"

Ignoring such pleasantries, I took the cod to the smith's shop, and hung him up on a hook.

About an hour later the Mullah turned up,

'bottled,' as usual, but able to walk and talk well enough to pass the picket.

"Wheresh my cod?" he demanded. "Eh, ye son o' Satan—whatjer done with my cod?"

"There she is!" I told him. "But you're not going to cook her to-night, are you?"

He looked at me, and burst into an enormous guffaw:

"Cook?" said he. "Cook hell!"

He walked, very unsteadily, across to the great fish, and then turned to me with a most solemn wink:

"I'll have ye mark, laddie, that the word 'cod,' is a good word having a variety of meanings. For instansch . . ." he tapped the cod familiarly in the region of the stomach: ". . . cod . . . !" says he. Then, to my amazement, he opened the fish's mouth, inserted his hand, drew from its throttle a bottle of whiskey: ". . . and *cod*!" says he, holding it up in the air.

I was, naturally, angry at the way I had been made a fool of, and at the thought of what would have happened if the master-at-arms had detected the presence of that bottle of whiskey.

"Damn it, Mullah!" I protested. "That was a dirty trick!"

He looked at me owlishly.

"Dirty tricksh? Not a bit of it! Good bib-biblical preshcedent for't. 'Member Jonah?"

I might have said a good deal more, but I remembered the hammer, and the uncertainty of the Mullah's temper, even when in his cups. But he saw I was annoyed, and seemed anxious to placate me, for he skilfully removed the cork from the whiskey bottle, and held it out to me.

"Here, have the first swig, my son! You've done well this nightsh . . .!"

I took a swig—and a good one, feeling that I had earned it, and the Mullah then turned in with his precious bottle, and no doubt had very soon drunk himself into insensibility.

But these were only interludes in the long and monotonous round of work. Naturally, after such long spells of arduous duty, when we did get ashore we went a bit mad, and had the best time we could manage.

The trouble was that, even when we were in harbour, we were never certain of getting ashore at any time.

For Admiral Arbuthnot frequently used to inspect the liberty men himself before they went ashore, and if there was the slightest thing wrong with them—the least detail irregular—woe betide them!

For instance, there was a standing order that all hands must carry sheath-knives at all times. The reason for this was that when we were towing—as frequently happened when at work—it might at any moment be necessary to cut the tow-line. But this, of course, did not really apply to when we were ashore. However, the order said 'at all times,' and Sir Robert stood by it.

Thus he would have the liberty men lined up before they went ashore, and then he would walk along the line and examine every man closely, back and front. One or two, with necks not properly washed, or some little irregularity in dress, he would fall out.

Then he would give the order :

"Show your knives!"

Those who were not ready for this were usually

deficient. Some would have forgotten to put their knives on; others would have thought it unnecessary to carry them on shore. But whatever the reason, no difference would be made. Sir Robert would snap out :

“ Fall out those men with no knives ! ” And when this had been done, would announce, crisply : “ Your shore-leave is cancelled. Dismiss ! ”

He was not exactly beloved aboard the *Blenheim*. But for all that he was a fine sailor, and a brave man, and eventually he met the end he would, I feel sure, have liked. He died an heroic death, killed in action at Jutland.

I thought it was going to be a change for the better when we were ordered back to Spithead, to get ready for the review, at which the German Kaiser was to be present.

I was doomed to disappointment. Instead of proceeding straight to Spithead, we steamed into Chatham, where we found a whole fleet of ships lying being prepared for the review. And, as usual, they were howling for divers all over the place.

My particular job was the cleaning of all inlet-valves, and under-water gratings, all of which were atrociously fouled with weeds and barnacles, and also the cleaning and adjusting of torpedo-bars.

The torpedo-bar is a flattened affair, from ten to twelve feet in length, which is extended from the side of the ship, under water, just forward of the torpedo-tube. It is designed to take off the force of the water when the ship is going ahead, and to prevent the rush of it from interfering with the accurate firing of the torpedo. The method of extending this is to work it by hand, by means of a crank and a cogged wheel.

I found most of those I had to deal with in a hell of a state, the cogs being fouled and clogged with innumerable barnacles and much weed. So I had to work like a nigger on jobs like this, just when I had been expecting to have the easy time that I considered I had earned.

I also learned another thing in these days—that like that of a woman or a doctor, a diver's work is never done.

The time came when I found myself at last due for a long week-end leave, and, feeling that I most thoroughly deserved it, I luxuriated in the idea for several days beforehand.

At last the great moment came, on the Friday. I came up for the last time, got out of my diving-rig, and strolled off, delighted with the idea that I should not see another copper helmet for several days. I went to my quarters to 'clean up' before setting off for Oxford.

I was just shaving when I heard noises—all too familiar ones.

"Where's the diver? Where's Bruce? Pass the word for Bruce, the diver . . .!"

I grinned to myself as I neatly finished lathering my face, and thought:

'Stick it, my hearties! But you miss your guess, this time. 'Cos why? 'Cos Bruce the diver's on leave, and you can all go and take a running kick at yourselves!'

But, alas, it was not to be as easy as all that!

A moment or two later the face of a warrant officer was thrust round the door.

"Oh, there you are!" says he. "Haven't you heard the shouting for you? You've got to report to the doctor at once!"

"That be damned for a tale!" said I, with a comfortable grin through the lather. "I'm on leave!"

"Can't help that!" was the answer. "There's another diver fouled, and you've got to go down to get him up! Step lively, now—the poor devil's in a bad way, seemingly!"

There was, of course, no answer to that, leave or no leave. I hastily wiped the lather off my face, with a running commentary on the subject that doesn't matter much, and hurried off to the doctor—with one side of my face shaved and the other not!

The M.O., aware of the need for hurry, ran the rule over me quickly.

"Perfectly fit!" says he. "But that's a nasty growth you've got on the left side of your face, my lad!"

"Yes, sir," said I. "Amateur theatricals—I'm playing the double role of Jacob and Esau!"

As I hurried to the scene of action I got some of the details of the mishap.

One of the most dangerous jobs a diver has to undertake in the way of his regular work is the inspection of moorings, which has to be carried out periodically.

With two or three vessels moored close together, as often is the case, there is a perfect network of great mooring-chains all about him, and a very considerable danger of getting his tube or life-line fouled in them.

And even worse may happen. Unless he takes full cognizance of the tide, when it changes all the moored vessels, of course, shift their positions, and the mooring-chains move with them. Caught in such a movement, the diver has little chance. I



remember the case of one poor devil who got nipped like that, between two chains. They freed him and got him up at last, but there was little left inside his diving-dress that could be recognized as ever having been a man.

And this chap I was to rescue had, apparently, been caught in a similar manner.

When we actually got to the scene, I heard the full story while being assisted into my diving-kit. The diver had, it seemed been down for nearly eight hours—an unusually long period. Some time ago he had told them through his telephone, that his breast-line and air-tube were fouled, but he hoped to get them clear. Then he had signalled no more, and their own signals had been unanswered. Efforts to pull him up had proved abortive—the breast-line was evidently hopelessly fouled.

I got my helmet on and climbed on to the iron ladder leading to the depths. Front-glass screwed up, and down the ladder I went. Got hold of the shot-rope and went down at regulation speed. No sense in hurrying below water, even when you can.

As I went down I was grasping the shot-rope with one hand, and letting the other diver's breast-line run through my fingers as I went. I needed that as a guide, so that I might find him as quickly as possible.

Only five fathoms down, so there was some sort of visibility—a sort of deep, green twilight, with a muddy tinge to it.

A strangely desolate scene at the bottom. The floor of mud, smooth, slimy and faintly gleaming. All sorts of litter strewn about. Lumps of rock and concrete, weed-covered and slimy; old barrels and

sunken packing-cases ; a tin pail or two—an old zinc tank. And the mooring-chains rearing up all about me and vanishing into the greenness overhead, like the fantastic stems of some nightmare forest of trees.

I took the other diver's breast-line in both hands now, and hand over hand I followed it along the sea-floor, treading very carefully to avoid stirring up the mud as much as possible. It led me through part of the forest of chains, and presently I found that it disappeared down into the mud . . . !

Laboriously I bent, and slowly plunged my arm into the soft, palpitating mud. I tried not to stir it up more than I could help, but for all that the water became so discoloured that I was, to all intents and purposes, in complete darkness.

An eerie business, groping down in that mud. One never knew quite what one might encounter lurking there in the slimy depths ! As a matter of fact I presently felt something cold, and a trifle more solid than the mud. Still holding the line with thumb and second finger, I investigated the foreign body with the other fingers. It flapped, wriggled, and slithered away. An eel, buried in the mud !

I was almost up to my shoulder, now—about as far as I could go. Then when just about to give it up in despair, my hand came into contact with something hard and rounded. A link of chain cable . . .

I realized now just what had happened. While the other diver had been working, the tide had ebbed. As the moored vessels above sank lower, the chains, of course, slackened. The slack of one of the chains had got across his breast-line and had taken it down

into the soft mud with it. Now the line was passed right underneath the chain, and so it was impossible to free it until the chain tautened again—and the tide was still ebbing.

I had to get both hands to work, to find the other end of the line. It was stretching out at right angles, and there was very little slack to work on. However, eventually, after some labour, I managed to cut the line, clear it of the cable, and then knot it together again.

Apparently the line was now quite clear, but when I pulled on it, in an endeavour to signal to the other diver, I found that the other end was quite firm, with no give to it at all. It seemed that it was fouled again elsewhere.

As before, hand over hand, I followed up the line, and a few yards away I found my unfortunate colleague.

He was buried in the mud waist deep—and head downwards! His legs and one hand were showing out of the mud, and that was all. I decided that it must be all up with him.

Further examination showed me that another mooring-chain had fouled his air-tube and it seemed to me that when this happened he must have lost his head, and allowed the weight of the chain to up-end him and drag him into the mud. Or, what had more probably happened was that he had leaned forward too suddenly, and the air had got into the back and legs of his diving-dress, turning him head downwards before he knew what he was doing—and then he had been helplessly dragged down.

Suddenly I saw something that restored hope to me, and made me commence to work like a madman! A faint bubbling in the mud—that meant that air,

at any rate, was still coming from his outlet valve—there was hope yet.

Chain cable is heavy stuff to lift around, even under water! But, somehow, after a few minutes of heaving and straining, I managed to get that cable clear of his air-tube, but by that time the water was of the texture of a good old London brown fog, and I couldn't see a thing.

I got hold of his legs, and tried to heave him up and out of the mud, but found it couldn't be done. It was at this moment that I felt something scrabbling in a most extraordinary way at my leg. I put my hand down to investigate, and it was immediately seized in a vice-like grip. . . .

A moment later I realized that the poor devil had got hold of me with his hand. I bent down and tried to free myself with the other, but he was as strong as the devil, and wouldn't let go.

There was only one thing to do, and I did it. I kicked and stamped at his hand with my leaden-soled boot until he had to let go!

Using his breast-line, I signalled up for more air for him, and then to haul him up. A moment or two later I could feel his suit swelling out with the force of air inside it. I could tell, too, that they were pulling hard on his breast-line. I also pulled and heaved and wriggled him about, and, after a few minutes of effort, he suddenly came free and shot upwards like a cannon-ball, knocking me backwards as he passed.

By the time I got up myself they had taken his helmet off, and a boat was rushing him ashore, *en route* for hospital. He was in a bad way, but still alive.

I got rid of my diving-rig, and in due course

went off on my slightly delayed leave—having first completed my shave, of course!

A few weeks later I was having a drink in a Gillingham pub (it was in Gillingham that I mostly spent my liberty time ashore) when another sailor came in and called for a pint of Burton.

Glancing at his badges, I saw that he, too, was a blacksmith and so, quite naturally, we commenced to swap notes. He was also a diver, and he was full of growls and grouches about the life.

"Only just come out of hospital!" he told me. "I got fouled in some mooring-chains a little while ago, and got stuck head down, in the mud. They only just got me up in time, too!"

"Is that so?" I queried. "And just when did that happen?"

He gave me the exact date, and I laughed.

"Well," I remarked, "it's a small world, and full of coincidences. From what I can see of it, I reckon you owe me at least a pint, and about two hours' leave!"

"What the hell d'you mean?"

"Oh, nothing—except that I'm the diver who got you up! That's all!"

But if I expected anything like gratitude, I was sadly doomed to disappointment.

"Oho!" said he, fixing me with a hard stare. "It was *you*, was it? Then you're the perishin' so and so that did this . . .!"

He exhibited a badly scarred hand, with every sign of annoyance.

I laughed.

"Sorry about that!" I told him. "But you got a grip on me, and you wouldn't let go. And there wasn't any time for ceremony, you know!"

"Ceremony be ——!" he growled. "You might have been a bit gentler, though."

His tone and manner annoyed me, and I came near to losing my temper.

"Hell's bells, man!" I snapped at him. "What did you expect me to do, then, kiss you and ask you to be a good boy?"

He finished his drink at a gulp.

"Bah!" said he. Then he spat on the floor and walked out!

So much for human gratitude!

## CHAPTER X

### ‘WAR—AND RUMOURS OF WAR . . .’

IN due course the review came off, and I took my humble part in it, which didn’t matter very much, anyway. The important thing about that review was really that it was then that some of the further-sighted of us got our first hint of coming trouble with Germany.

I well remember a conversation I happened to hear just after the review between a group of P.O.’s. To those who do not remember, I may explain here that when the Kaiser came over to attend the review in his yacht, the *Hohenzollern*, he was received on this side by Prince Louis of Battenberg, and one of the P.O.’s in that group had actually witnessed the meeting.

“What I says is this,” quoth he. “There’s somethin’ up!”

“What d’you mean, there’s something up?”

“What I say, mate. There’s somethin’ wrong with the bloomin’ works. If you’d seen those two blokes meet . . .!”

“Why, wot about it? Wot did they do, then?”

“Well, they didn’t do anything, exactly. It was like this. There’s old German Bill, at the first, smilin’ away like a good-un. I must say that, what with that there hookey moustache of his, and his big nose with his eyes set a bit too close to it, that smile was something like the sort of smile a tiger

gives just afore he jumps on you—but it was a smile all right—an’ he was trying to be all friendly. But that there Prince Louis of ours, his smile looked like you’d put a penny in the slot for it, and then not got your money’s worth! Sorter frozen, and mechanical, if you know what I mean! An’ then Old Kaiser Bill, he caught it too—an’ that smile of his went like someone had wiped it off his chivvy. And the way they shook hands—like a couple of boxers before a fight, when one of ’em knows darn well that the other was out with his best girl the night before! And after that they was mighty polite to each other—O, mighty polite, they was. But if you’d got a nose at all, you could smell that things was all wrong!”

“Well,” said somebody else. “What about it, anyway? I mean, what do you reckon it signifies, if anything?”

“Wot does it signify? Why, I’ll tell you wot it bloomin’ well signifies—wot I’ve been thinkin’ for a long time, ’s a matter of fact. That, before long, we’re goin’ to have a blinkin’ war with Germany! That’s wot!”

A bubble of incredulous laughter at that.

“What, war with Germany? When they’ve always been our allies against the French and the Russians? And when the Kaiser is related to our own Royal Family? Tell us another, Jack. You’re seein’ things!”

“All right! Have it your own way—but you’ll see, mate, you’ll see!”

“He’s been listening to that old fathead Roberts, that’s his trouble!” interpolated someone.

The first speaker swung on the last, angrily:

“Well, what’s the matter with old Bobs,



anyway? He knows a thing or two, don't he? He pulled the Boer War out of the soup for us, didn't he?"

"Yes, maybe! But that don't make a bleedin' prophet of him, does it?"

"Well, you shut your silly trap about Lord Roberts, anyway! Who the hell are you to criticize your superiors, I'd like to know . . .?"

The argument degenerated into a bickering, and I left it.

But that scene has always stuck in my mind as the first rumour I ever heard of the coming Armageddon.

There followed a period of monotonous work, with little or nothing happening that is worth relating. And then came the next naval review—that of July 1914.

And then we really did begin to realize that something was happening. I think we naval men knew that a war was coming long before most people had even a notion of it, because of the work we had to put in getting the ships ready for immediate action.

On 2 August, at Sheerness, the Fleet was frantically coaling, and all divers were hard at work laying protective booms around the harbour.

But even then I think some of us felt it couldn't really happen.

I remember one afternoon during that period—it was about 1 August, I think—looking out on the drill square at Chatham, where I had been sent for something, and thinking how peaceful and ordinary it all looked.

There was a squad of raw recruits on the square, and they were receiving the old, old lecture—the

same one as I had received as a recruit, and from the same man.

“You’re in the Navy now, my lads, and don’t forget it! You haven’t got any father, mother, sister, brother, nor home, now. The Navy’s all that you’ve got now—and so long as you do your duty by her, she’ll do hers by you! And the first thing you’ve got to remember is this—when you get an order, from me or anyone else—I don’t want you to walk to it, or run to it—what you got to do is to *fly* to it, like bloomin’ birds—and don’t forget it!”

Across the further end of the square a fatigue-party made their way, carrying buckets, in the leisurely time-honoured way of all fatigue-parties. From a clump of trees in the distance I could hear birds singing. It was all so peaceful, the very idea of war seemed ridiculous.

All the same, we naval people knew it was coming! It was queer to see people in the towns walking about their usual business, and seemingly quite unconscious of what was hanging over their heads. Girls and boys laughing and chaffing at street corners; lovers arming each other down quiet by-ways; housewives doing their marketing; husbands gossiping over their pints in the ‘local.’

Yet all the time there seemed to be a queer *tension* in the atmosphere, and it seemed strange to me that these people did not seem to sense it.

All long leave was stopped, and all the time we were working frantically getting the Fleet ready. But ‘liberty men’ were still allowed ashore in the evenings—I suppose the authorities realized that ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’—and besides, if the worst happened, it might be a

long time before any of us got a chance to stretch our legs ashore again.

On the fatal 4 August I went ashore with the liberty men, and the boat, as usual, took us up to Gillingham Pier, where we landed and took a tram into the town.

I and one or two chums had a couple of drinks, and then decided to go to the pictures. We settled ourselves down and saw one picture right through. The second one—I don't remember the title of it—was a costume play, and there was a stirring sequence of scenes depicting a fight between two of the old 'wooden-wall' warships of about Nelson's time.

One of our party laughed, and said :

"Get a good eyeful, boys—it may be a lesson to you. We shall be at it ourselves before long!"

"Oh, rats!" snapped another one. "I'm getting fed up with all this war and rumours of war business. Why worry, it'll all blow over as it's done often enough before!"

The film flickered, and went off the screen, leaving it dark and blank.

"Hullo, the film's broken again!"

Stamping and some ironical clapping from the audience. But it wasn't that after all. There was a moment's pause, and then a hastily printed slide was put on :

'WAR DECLARED WITH GERMANY.

ALL NAVAL RATINGS ARE ORDERED TO REPORT ON  
SHIP OR AT DEPOT IMMEDIATELY.'

There was a silence, broken by the small orchestra which broke out into 'Rule, Britannia' and 'Land of Hope and Glory'—to which tunes the sailors

who formed a large part of the audience swarmed to the doors and out into the streets, talking excitedly.

Civilians in the audience cheered raggedly as we went, and there were some more outside to give us another one—plainly the news had got around. A soldier on a motor-cycle dashed through the little crowd at speed, sounding his horn vigorously.

“Well, what about it now, Bill?” demanded the fellow who had commented on the film to the one who had picked him up on it. “Looks as though it’s come after all, doesn’t it?”

“Well, what about it?” answered Bill. “It won’t last any time—we shall be in Berlin before Christmas!”

Which was precisely what most people—poor mutts—were saying.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SEA-DOGS OF WAR ARE LOOSED

AT the Depot all was excitement. Naval reservists and even pensioners, called up for the War, were already coming in, and the men themselves were like schoolboys getting ready for a paper-chase !

I found myself appointed to H.M.S. *Euryalus*, a cruiser—long, with low freeboard and four funnels.

I joined her on the 5th, but nothing much seemed to happen. For three days we just lay at anchor, busily putting the finishing touches of ‘spit and polish’ that were considered necessary to prepare us for action.

Then, on the 8th, all of a sudden we found ourselves at sea, headed for Ostend with a large detachment of Marines, who were to be landed there.

We were, of course, all excitement, and very much on the *qui vive*, hoping desperately to sight an enemy ship, if only the periscope of a submarine ! We were to learn not to be quite so eager for contact with those gentry before long !

However, we had no luck, and the trip passed without incident. We sailed into Ostend, and landed our Marines, and a queer sight they were, too, when it came to the landing. There was a

shortage of rifles and equipment, and quite a lot of them were armed only with bayonets tied on to poles! They looked like a batch of old-time pikemen!

"Blimey!" I heard a warrant officer comment. "If that's what they're going to fight Kaiser Bill with, what a hope we've got!"

"Don't be so windy!" someone reproved him. "Why, we could lick the old ——er with our bare hands, if it came to it!"

Such was the spirit of optimism in the Navy in those days—and, indeed, right through the War. It may, in view of what we know now, seem a bit idiotic, but all the same I think it went a long way to help win the War.

Back to Chatham once more, where we found ourselves part of the North Sea Patrol, the fleet consisting of the *Cressy*, *Aboukir*, *Bacchante*, *Hogue*, and the *Euryalus*, which was selected by Admiral Christian as his flagship.

So out we went into the North Sea to look for enemy submarines.

On 28 August we had our first taste of action—our 'baptism of fire' at the Battle of the Bight (Heligoland).

Before going into action orders were given for all hands to take a bath and put on clean clothes, which seemed to me at the time an unnecessary touch of foppishness. I learned after, however, that this was done to guard against infection of wounds from dirty bodies or clothes.

One of the most frequent questions asked me about my late profession is:

'What does a naval diver do when there is a

sea-fight on? What is his duty and where is his battle-station?’

Naturally, in the ordinary way, a diver does not go down into the sea during an engagement, or when being fired upon. As I shall mention later, I have, as a matter of fact, been under the waves and under fire at the same time, but that was in exceptional circumstances.

Aboard ship, the diver, however, is also the official fire-fighter, and is supplied with the necessary kit and equipment for this work. And he is specially trained for this. It is his business during a sea-fight, when there is always a very considerable risk of the ship taking fire in some part or other, to deal with any outbreak that may occur.

His battle-station is therefore the diving-room, where the fire-fighting, as well as the diving, equipment is kept. This room is in telephonic communication with the bridge and elsewhere and immediately a fire breaks out, or any signs of one are seen, the diver is communicated with.

Then, in oilskin suit, thigh-boots, and smoke-helmet, he hurries to the scene of action, where he investigates the extent of the outbreak and supervises the work of extinguishing it. He has a crew of assistants, who play hoses upon him while he is doing his work, if necessary.

On this occasion, for the first time, I took up my ‘action-station’ knowing that a real battle was toward. I had done it so often before, in practice, that there seemed nothing strange or out of the way about the business, and as to my sensations, I have to admit that I did not feel at all frightened, nervous, or even jumpy. My principal feeling was one of

annoyance that I was not in a better position to see all that was going on. My next one was a sort of under-feeling that the whole thing was unreal—that we were not really going to fight, or to be in any danger at all. Even when I felt the ship shudder from the recoil of her own guns, or jump at the impact of enemy shells, it still did not seem really *real*.

But when I saw the stretcher-bearers hurrying their grisly loads of wounded flesh to the surgeon, realization did come to me! However, we were not sunk, and no hurt of any sort came my way.

After the battle there was considerable excitement aboard the *Euryalus*. We had captured German ships, and we all knew that the prize-money system was still a part of the regulations. So every one of us was due for some prize-money!

We based our ideas on the old sea stories by Captain Marryat and G. A. Henty we had read when youngsters, which told of the days when lucky sailors had made small fortunes out of prize-money. Ships, we argued, cost a devil of a lot more to-day than they had done in the days of the old wooden windjammers, and therefore our prize-money ought to amount to something quite useful.

We planned what we were going to do with it—spent it in advance, in fact. Some announced their intention of buying themselves out of the Navy (when the War was over, of course) and using the rest of the money to take a pub with! The more modest talked of cars and extra-posh motor cycles.

But when the share-out came, I found that my share of the prize-money amounted to precisely



6s. 5d. Some of the men, of course, got even less. And that was *that* !

A very sad day indeed dawned for us in September, when we left the rest of the fleet to carry on the patrol work, and, under orders, made for Chatham. But before we arrived there we received a wireless message to the effect that three of our ships, the *Hogue*, the *Cressy*, and the *Aboukir*, had all been sunk by enemy submarines.

That meant that something like eight hundred lives had been lost—all loyal and gallant seamen !

It was the first blow of the kind any of us had received, and, believe me, it went home ! When Admiral Christian heard it he burst into tears and wept like a child, as did some men of lesser rank, and there wasn't a man or boy amongst us who was not plunged into the depths of melancholy by the terrible news. I saw some men crying like kids ; others vowing a terrible vengeance against the Hun if ever they got within gunshot of him ; and others who sat silent, and very, very sad.

After a very short stay in Chatham we were under orders again, this time to escort troops and stores to and from Gibraltar.

With enemy submarines well on the job this was a somewhat wearing job, our big fear always being that the subs. might give us the slip—get under our guard, so to speak—and sink one of the troopships. However, despite one or two exciting moments, this didn't happen.

On New Year's Eve, 1914—the last day of the old year—we heard another piece of sad news—that the *Formidable* had been sunk by an enemy

submarine just off Plymouth ! The language that was used about the cheek of the German commander was something to listen to. And the vows of what we would do if we could only get to grips with a Boche sub. !

My work in those early days of the War consisted mainly, as a smith, of repairs and alterations and, as a diver, of going down whenever we were in harbour and examining the ship's bottom. It was covered with sheets of copper, and had to be frequently scraped, as barnacles were plentiful, and were liable to interfere with our speed.

All aboard were getting pretty fed up with the 'ferry work' between Gib. and home, but we were kept at it until March, and then we got a little excitement in that we suddenly found ourselves hitting the open sea all on our own, and learned that we were romantically sailing 'under sealed orders.'

Eventually we found ourselves in the Suez Canal, and under the orders of Admiral Pearce. Almost as soon as we got there we met with a mishap which gave me a new experience—that of going down under water when an attack was imminent. For some time the *Swiftsure* and *Triumph* had been engaged in repelling the Turkish advance on Suez, and we knew that we might be well in the fun almost at any minute.

And then, just as we were tying up to a buoy : 'Half-speed ahead ! . . . Stop ! . . . Slow ahead ! . . . Half-speed astern . . . !' there came a sudden grinding from the stern, and (although we didn't hear it) much blasphemy from the engine-room.

One of our screws had fouled a wire, and was all jammed up !

And then, of course, it was :

‘Diver ! Diver . . . ! Pass the word for the diver . . . !’

And myself off to the doctor for the usual examination, and then down to have a look at the damage. It might have been worse, but it was pretty bad, and for several hours I was labouring away down there clearing the screw, and all the time wondering if they were fighting up there above my head. It was queer to be shut away down below there in my diving-dress and to know that on the surface my mess-mates might be fighting for their lives ! And even less comfortable to realize what might happen to me if a shell hit my pump up there !

However, nothing of the sort happened, and after a gruelling job below I came up to find all still well.

But a little later we were in the thick of it, supporting the Australians in their repulse of the Turkish Camel Corps.

Soon after this we were ordered to Smyrna, and after transferring the flag, we pushed off there at top speed.

We wanted surrender of the harbour at Smyrna, but the Turks didn’t see eye to eye with us in the matter, and so we and the harbour batteries started to bang away at each other.

The noise was terrific, and the smoke—especially from the Turkish guns—tremendous. Like most of us in those days, I had had a notion that the Turks were no marksmen, and couldn’t hit a haystack at ten yards’ range. But I soon found this to be a

mistake, for some of their shells landed very nicely—for them! Meantime we hammered away at the batteries, but although we seemed to be doing quite a lot of damage, it didn't have the effect of slackening their fire at all.

At length, for some reason—probably to give us and them a chance to see to the wounded properly—we hoisted a flag of truce. I gather that the idea was to arrange a temporary cessation of hostilities for a few hours. But the Turks wouldn't have any of that—they took no more notice of that flag of truce than if it had been a dirty handkerchief, and kept on hammering away at us like one o'clock.

Several times we were holed, above the water-line, and shells burst on the lower decks with terrific percussions that shook the whole ship from stem to stern, and made some of us feel that she was going down at any moment. Actually there was no danger of this, but those shells certainly did a lot of damage, killing many and wounding more.

Lying near us was the converted aircraft carrier *Annie Rickmus*, and later on—I suppose because she was more roomy, or possibly because she was out of the line of fire—we transferred all our wounded to her.

But Master Turk must have spotted this, for in the middle of the night he let go a land torpedo and sure enough got her well and truly—ten feet below the water-line!

There was a terrific explosion in the silence of the night, and then shouts and yells of terror from the crew of the *Annie Rickmus*, who were Greeks and panicked badly.

Tired out, I was in a deep sleep, from which the reverberating crash of the torpedo partially aroused me. The next thing I knew was that I was being roughly shaken, and the old familiar cry was sounding in my ear :

‘Diver ! Diver wanted ! Come on, Bruce—show a leg, my lad . . . ! ’

Still half-dazed with sleep I was rushed in front of the doctor, who gave me a hasty once-over (he having been just aroused from bye-byes himself !), and then it was into the boat, into my diving-dress, and down to inspect the damage to the *Annie Rickmus*.

Already she had a bad list on her with the pumps going all out.

It was an eerie sensation, going down from the black darkness of night, into the even blacker darkness of the depths. The hole, I found, was ten feet down—and, ye gods, what a hole it was !

Going down I had been still half-stupid with the sleep from which I had been so rudely awakened. It was, I think, when I discovered the size of the hole that a nasty thought first came to me (I was really beginning to wake up by that time). And the thought was this : by then the Turks would have discovered that, although they had made a direct hit, they had not succeeded in sinking the poor old *Annie*. What more natural, then, than that they should send off another of their infernal land torpedoes, on about the same course, to finish the job . . . ?

Shut away down there, out of sight or sound of the upper world, it was a very unpleasant thought indeed that at any moment, suddenly and without

warning, a great cigar-shaped projectile might come hurtling, to strike within a few feet of me and to blow me to—well, wherever it is divers go when they're blown to smithereens. . . .

It rather gave me the creeps, but after a moment or too I realized that, anyway, I couldn't do anything about it one way or the other! If it came it came—*sanfairyann*, and all that!

But in the meantime I had a pressing problem to deal with in the matter of that hole in the ship's side. The water was rushing in at such a pace that no pumps could cope with it, and although I didn't know how she was fixed for water-tight bulkheads, the chances were that they wouldn't stand against the accumulating pressure of that water.

The first thing to do was to measure the hole, and that in itself, owing to the size of it, presented a bit of a problem.

However, after a little thought I got an idea, and had a talk with my attendant through the telephone. I got them up above to hoist me slowly upwards, and by this means I was able to get a notion of the measurements.

Then I went to the surface, and got them busy. Some men began to fasten sixteen-foot collision-mats together, so as to make a temporary stopping for the leaks. Others, the carpenters from the *Euryalus*, got to work with empty oil-drums and what-not, strengthening the threatened bulk-heads, and still others at the hand-pumps. Every pump on the ship, hand and power, was working at top speed to cope with the inrush of water.

It was while I was on top that I learned of yet another possible danger—mines being floated off

from the shore, which, with the ebbing tide, would certainly reach us and blow the whole show to Davy Jones's locker !

Well, I told myself, it was all in the day's march. I got on with the job. A staging had now been rigged and lowered, and down I went.

Hardly had I got down when I was able to feel—one couldn't *hear*, of course—that heavy firing was going on, whether from us or from the shore I had no notion. All I knew was that if we were doing the firing, it was all to the good—it would keep those blighters on shore, perhaps, too busy to bother about interfering with us. But if *they* were doing the shooting—then it wasn't so good.

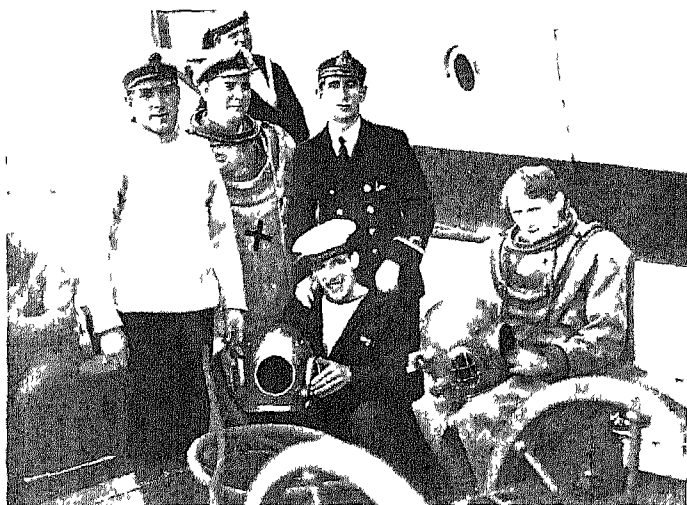
However I had sense enough to realize that it was really nothing to do with me, anyway—although it might well end in passing me on to some better land. My job was to get that enormous collision-mat in place, and check the inrush of water.

And presently, down came the mat, lowered from above.

Lord, how we worked ! Fully conscious that any moment might be our last, we were not disposed to waste any time, apart from any other reason for haste.

Once I went up for a spell, and then learned that our mine-sweepers were out, patrolling to prevent, if possible, any floating mines from reaching us. I also learned that we were bombarding the town, good and plenty, by way of reprisal, and that already three or four fires had broken out in the more populous parts.

That was all to the good, and down I went again to finish the job.

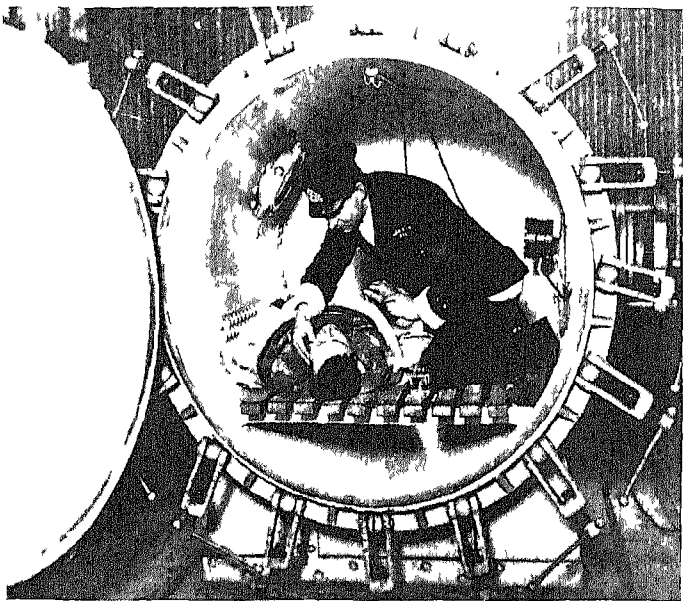


DIVERS ABOUT TO DESCEND  
Mr. Bruce marked x

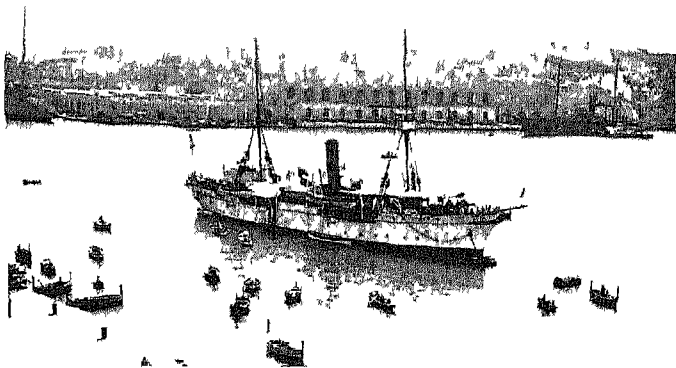


THE AUTHOR IN HIS SMITHY ABOARD H.M.S  
*MARLBOROUGH*





A PATIENT IN THE DECOMPRESSION CHAMBER  
(see Chap VIII)



H M S *ENDEAVOUR*  
Survey Ship (1922)  
(see Chap XXII)

Finished at last, after hours of work, and still, rather to our surprise, in the land of the living, we went up—and got the surprise of our lives.

Apparently at some time during the night those responsible for the old *Annie* had thought it as well to slip her cables and let her drift—the idea being that she would then drift as fast as any floating mines sent to find her, and, by shifting her position under cover of the darkness, baffle any attempts to hit her with another torpedo.

So that when we got up, after working for hours on the repair, we found that we had drifted out to sea, and were well out of range of anything they could do from the shore.

However, a daylight examination decided the commander that it was impossible to keep the ship afloat for long, and so we crawled back to Imbros, stern first, and there the ship was beached. I have often wondered what happened to her after that, but I never learned—nothing unusual in those hectic days of war.

I returned, with the boat and the rest of the *Euryalus* men, to our ship. We carried on the bombardment, and eventually attained our objective. After which we steamed gaily off, back to Suez.

Here we had a change of commanders—Admiral Pearce being replaced by Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, a fine sailor who, before the end of the War, was to become First Sea Lord of the Admiralty.

I now found myself mighty busy as a diver once more, for at Mudros I was down almost every day, mostly on such jobs as examining the under-water fittings of liners, investigating strange noises in the

screw-alley, and so on—also searching for jettisoned stores, examining moorings, and recovering boom defence material that had drifted. Donkey work, for the most part, and pretty monotonous.

But livelier times were lying ahead in wait for us !

## CHAPTER XII

### GALLIPOLI

IT was on 23 April 1915, while we were still at Mudros, that we of the *Euryalus* started on the little adventure that permitted us to play our part in making a real bit of War history.

Gallipoli . . . ! It was a word that meant very little to any of us then—and I don't suppose the vast majority of people in the world even knew what the word signified—and even if they knew it was a place, *it is doubtful if they could have said just where it was situated.*

Yet, in the space of a few days, things were to happen in that ill-omened spot that have since made the name a familiar one to every school-child.

Our part in the glorious and inglorious events that made history in Gallipoli was a comparatively humble one.

On the 22nd we were all made aware, from various activities about the ship, that 'something was up.' A little later it became clear that we were going to sea—and later still came the rumours that we were taking troops to the Dardanelles. At which news there was much spitting over the side, and some bitter remarks about the 'old hooker' being 'turned into a ruddy troopship,' and so on.

But it was no use to grumble or complain (as the poet says). Orders were orders, and there was a

war on, and whatever part was allotted to us we must play to the best of our ability—and that was that.

On the following day, the 23rd, we took on board the 1st Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, and immediately put out to sea, and headed for Gallipoli.

There were nine hundred of the Fusiliers in all, and during the short voyage we, of course, had a lot of laughing and chaffing with them. We swapped cigarettes, and showed each other our photos of the wife and kids, or the girl, and so on—indulging in all those little civilities and amenities that created such a wonderful sense of fellow-feeling and real comradeship during those dark days of the War. In this case little knowing that we were even then on the eve of what can only be regarded now as one of the darkest of those days.

Nine hundred of them, there were—nine hundred men, all with mothers, wives or sweethearts at home, thinking of them and fearing for them! Nine hundred men—strong, lively, lusty, laughing fellows . . . ! I don't know how many of them I joked with or talked to during that brief run—but I do know that I saw very few of them ever again. . . .

And on the 25th we landed them on the beach at Cape Helles—it should have been shortened to Cape Hell—still full of pluck and gaiety. And the former never deserted them, though the latter may have done so—small blame to them if it did.

So much has been written and said about that great day of slaughter—and, for the most part, by people so much better fitted than myself to speak

or write with authority. Anyway, who the deuce cares what an ex-naval C.P.O. thinks about the landing at Gallipoli, even if he was there at the time? So much, I say, has been written and said about it that I shall not bore my reader by attempting to give any idea of the general action—I will content myself with my own personal observations and impressions.

We landed those nine hundred heroes on the beach at Cape Helles, and we cheered them as they went ashore. But we soon stopped cheering!

For it became pretty evident to us who watched that the task was an impossible one. In my own mind's eye I can still see the shattered remnant of those gallant troops—if, indeed, any remnant was left—trying to advance over the beach under our ship's gun-fire.

At school we used to recite the 'Charge of the Light Brigade,' and our childish voices used to mouth such gallant phrases as 'Into the jaws of Death—into the mouth of Hell . . .!' And now, by God, I thought, we're seeing just what the Jaws of Death and the Mouth of Hell look like—when they're in full action.

Far be it from me to belittle any heroic action or feat, but I cannot bring myself to believe that the charge of the gallant Light Brigade at Balaclava was any finer or more heroic than the advance of the Lancashire Fusiliers through a hell of death and decimation which, if only from the improvement in armaments since the old days of the Crimea, must have been infinitely more horrific, on that glorious and fatal day at Gallipoli.

And I will say this—and I think that those of

my mess-mates who were in a similar position that day, and who still survive, will undoubtedly agree with me—that I have seldom suffered a greater sense of mental agony than that involved in standing there and helplessly watching while men we had been comrades with—fellow countrymen, at that—were reduced from lusty, laughing fellows to mere quivering heaps of ragged and blood-stained flesh, there on that accursed beach.

But, in the end, they beat the enemy and they beat our own agonized pessimism. For in the end they won!

It has been said—and I heartily agree with it—that but for the undaunted bravery and persistence of a small party of the 1st Battalion of the Fusiliers who, by taking advantage of the shelter offered by some outlying rocks, managed, at last and in the face of dreadful loss of life, to work their way round into a position from which it was possible for them to enfilade the enemy trenches, the day would have been lost, and we should have failed to gain our footing in the peninsula.

But they did it! They succeeded, and all honour to them! Succeeded, but at what a cost! For while that morning nine hundred men landed from the *Euryalus* and rushed up the beach, by the same evening there were less than three hundred of them left alive.

That day is, I think, engraved deeper in my memory than any other I knew during the War years, and I think the same applies to most of the other *Euryalus* men who were present at that time.

Indeed, a small sequel to that day's events rather tends to prove as much, for, in the parish church of

Bury, all who wish to may see a tablet bearing the following inscription :

‘To Commemorate the Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men of the 1st Battalion the Lancashire Fusiliers, who fell in action at Gallipoli in 1915, this tablet is placed here by the officers and ship’s company of H.M.S. *Euryalus*, the ship which landed the Fusiliers at Cape Helles on April 25th, 1915.’

The money for this memorial tablet was raised entirely by voluntary subscription amongst the *Euryalus* men who were present at the landing, and amounted in all to £60. This was eventually placed on deposit with the bank by our *padre*, the Rev. D. J. Jones, and Lieutenant R. Bernard. Various delays took place, and until 1928 it was impossible to do anything about it. By that time the money amounted, with interest, to £81 16s. 4d.

On 12 February 1929 the Rev. Jones sent me the following letter :

H.M.S. *Renown*,

12/2/29.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

I am sending you a copy of a reference sheet which I have just sent to some old *Euryalus* officers. Let me know what you think about it. Perhaps you might care to come and have a chat some time about it.

Yours sincerely,

PADRE.

The sheet in question called attention to the sum collected, and the accumulated interest, and went on



to state that as, owing to the inability of the War Graves Commission to find any means of using this fund in Gallipoli in such a way as to satisfy the object for which it had been subscribed, it was suggested that some kind of memorial or charity at home, in England, should be started with the money.

I later wrote to the Chaplain as follows :

H.M.S. *Marlborough*,  
24 February, 1929.

DEAR SIR,

Many thanks for your letter. . . . C.P.O. Parker and myself would like to put forward the following suggestion :

‘ That a brass plate should be installed in the Chapel of the Barracks of the Lancashire Fusiliers, from the ship’s company of H.M.S. *Euryalus*, together with the White Ensign and the Colours of the Regiment.’

We suggest that the work could probably be completed by the 25th April, 1930, and that Admiral of the Fleet Lord Wester Wemyss or one of the other senior officers might be approached to unveil the memorial.

We think that this suggestion might be acceptable, and would request that it be put forward as one possible solution of the question.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

H. J. BRUCE.

Chaplain the Rev. D. J. Jones,

H.M.S. *Renown*.

To this I received the following reply :

H.M.S. *Renown*,

at Barcelona.

28th February, 1929.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

I was very glad to get your letter concerning the Lancashire Fusiliers Fund, and the suggestions you and C.P.O. Parker have made are, in my opinion, admirable. I shall take good care that your views are given full consideration when the time comes to settle finally the form of the memorial.

Would it be too much to ask you to get into touch with as many old *Euryalus* men as possible during your next leave period, and to let me know what they think ? There must be a good many living around Chatham and Sheerness, and I can think of no one more likely to get in touch with them than yourself.

Yours very sincerely,

D. J. JONES,

*Chaplain.*

C.P.O. Bruce,

H.M.S. *Marlborough*.

Eventually the suggestion made by Parker and myself was adopted, with slight modifications, and the following are extracts from the *Daily Telegraph* report of 28 April 1930 :

‘ GALLIPOLI DAY

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SOLDIERS HONOURED BY NAVAL MEN

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TABLET TO LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS

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(*From our Special Correspondent.*)

Bury. Lancs. April 27.

‘An unusual and it is believed historically unprecedented feature—the unveiling by Admiral of the Fleet Lord Wester Wemyss of a War memorial subscribed for and presented by officers and men of the Royal Navy to the memory of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of a line regiment of the British Army—marked the annual Gallipoli Commemoration by the Lancashire Fusiliers at Bury to-day. . . . In all the years since 1915 the gallantry of the Lancashire Fusiliers has been kept in mind by the seamen who witnessed it, and although the men of the *Euryalus* at that time have long wished to give public expression to their admiration of what they saw, the obstacles that stood in the way have only been overcome within the last fourteen months. Thanks partly to the interest of Chief Petty Officer Bruce and the influence of the Rev. D. J. Jones, R.N., a subscription among those who were of the ship’s company has provided funds for a white marble tablet to be erected in Bury parish church among other war memorials of the Lancashire Fusiliers there enshrined. . . . The Bishop of Hulme in an address welcomed the new tablet, not only for

its unique character as a token of appreciation by naval men of the gallantry of soldiers, but also as doing something to remind the nation that Lancashire soldiers distinguished themselves by their bravery and self-sacrifice at Gallipoli in no degree less nobly than the men of New Zealand and Australia to whom such wonderful tributes had been paid.'

Such, then, is the story that lies behind that simple tablet in Bury Church, and I may say that I shall always feel proud of the small share I had in the placing of it there, because of my memories of some of the brave fellows whose heroism it is there to commemorate.

## CHAPTER XIII

### GALLIPOLI: THE STORY OF A PHOTOGRAPH

ALMOST immediately after the landing of the Lancashires, I was loaned out to the transport *River Clyde* which had been run ashore in landing the troops on 'V' Beach. It was my job to go down to make an examination of how she lay, the nature of the bottom, and so on, and to make a detailed report so they might judge the possibility of getting her off, and if it was found possible the best way to set about it.

I duly went down, and found her nestling into the soft sand as prettily as a rabbit in its burrow. But when it came to exploring the bottom around her, I found myself in some sad company.

She had had the Munsters and Dublins aboard when she had been run aground, and had landed them for the action. During the process of landing they had drawn a heavy fire, and a large number of them had been shot and fallen into the sea, and now, as I moved around between the ship and the shore, I came across these unfortunates, lying sprawled in all sorts of positions, weighted down by their arms and equipment.

It was a weird as well as an infinitely sad sight to see these brave poor fellows all around me, some of them with their limbs twisted into all sorts of grotesque positions, others lying there as though

peacefully asleep. There was one poor chap who was in the veritable attitude of a boxer about to defend himself from attack, while another looked exactly as though he was running for his life.

Somehow I hated the idea of those bodies remaining there gradually to decompose in the water, or, worse still, to make food for the fishes. So when, having completed my job, I went up and made my report to Commander Unwin personally, I mentioned this to him, and suggested that I might be able to get some of them ashore, where they could be buried in comparative decency. Commander Unwin applauded my suggestion, and so down I went again on what I might describe as a grisly errand of mercy, collecting the remains of these gallant fellows for burial ashore.

I had collected quite a number when I came upon one poor chap who particularly aroused my sympathies. To start with he was little more than a boy, and he was lying, curled up against a large lump of rock, and looking so exactly like a sleeping child that, for about the first time in my diving career, I found myself with tears in my eyes inside my great copper helmet.

He had bright golden curls, and his eyes were closed. There was an expression of absolute peace on his face; his head rested on one arm, and his legs were together and his knees drawn up. I have often seen little children sleeping in exactly that position.

I have heard things said about war turning men into brutes and animals, but my own experience has been that just as often it makes sentimentalists of them. It certainly did of me in that moment, and behind that copper helmet of mine all sorts of

queer thoughts were drifting through my head. I saw a mother bending over that boy's cot, watching him as he slept, and little dreaming in what circumstances he would go to sleep and never wake up in this world again. And I thought of that same mother, maybe at that very moment sitting and thinking of her boy—wondering what he was doing just then.

I wondered what she would say—how she would feel—if she could know the incredible truth. If, by some magic, she could have seen what must have been a strange picture—her son lying there dead on the ocean-bottom, with a grotesque figure, inflated and huge, and with a great, round copper head, slightly inclined so as to train its one enormous eye on the silent and prostrate figure, standing over him. . . .

At last I called myself the sentimental fool I suppose I was, and bent down to turn the poor boy over into a more convenient position for lifting. It was then I saw that the flap of one of his tunic breast-pockets was unbuttoned, and that something was projecting a little way from the pocket itself. Hardly knowing what I did I pulled it out, and was just able to distinguish that it was the photograph of a young girl.

I kept it, and later, when my grim job was finished, I dried it off in the boat and carefully pressed it flat. I was then able to see that it was the portrait of a young, pretty, smiling girl, and it was signed : 'Your Loving Sweetheart.'

For some reason there was a lady's name and address on the back—the address was somewhere in Newbury, and at the first opportunity I sent the photo off to that address, enclosing a letter in which

I gave carefully guarded details. That is to say I mentioned how the boy had died, like a hero, in one of the most important actions in the War, and how, when it came to burying him, I had found the photograph and was now sending it on. I mentioned the peaceful look on his face, and that in my opinion he had not suffered much. But I never mentioned how I had recovered his body from the bottom of the sea.

In due course I received a most charming and grateful letter from the poor girl, enclosing a box of cigarettes (which, in those hard-up war days, I hope she could properly afford) and asking me for further details—which, unfortunately, I was unable to supply. After that I never heard again.

It was just one of those queer, human interludes in the grim business of war !



## CHAPTER XIV

### GALLIPOLI: 'MAD ANNA'

**M**Y next job was a decidedly queer one, comprising the strangest ride I think I have ever taken.

At that time a Lieutenant Nuttal—an officer and a gentleman under whom I was very pleased to serve—was in charge of my diving operations, and one day he ordered me to the bottom to look for lost ammunition.

I don't know whose invention that particular method of searching was, but it was certainly ingenious, if not too comfortable for the diver!

A huge iron grating was sunk, and this was attached by a cable to a powerful motor boat. I then went down, and perched myself upon the grating, whereupon the motor boat was started up, and I was then borne slowly over the bed of the ocean. The diving-boat, with my attendants and the air-pump, etc., was, of course, towed alongside the motor boat.

It certainly was one of the weirdest rides I have ever taken, and the scenery was decidedly of the nightmare variety, for the most part. There were old boxes, barrels, iron tanks, lengths of chain, masses of tangled wire, jettisoned stores and so on in profusion. Boats and the skeletons of boats, covered with weed and barnacles. Sheets of corrugated iron, and in one place a great heap of

bricks, also weed covered. Once I saw an old-fashioned gun, or cannon—it must have been there a very long time.

It was like passing through a Land of the Dead, for there was quite a population of dead horses, mules, and a few dogs—also, alas, the remains of what had once been men, in varying stages of decomposition. On most of these the eels, crabs, and other scavengers of the ocean-bed were busily at work. It certainly could not be described as a joy-ride!

From time to time I would signal 'stop,' and then, when the forward motion of my grating had ceased, climb down and make a closer investigation. In this way I recovered quite a lot of ammunition packed in cases.

The little excursions from my 'sea-bed car' entailed quite a lot of hard work, because the current from the Sea of Marmora showed a very strong disposition to push and pull me about at its will. It was very much like fighting against a tremendous gale of wind, only worse, because a gale usually comes in gusts, with an occasional lull, but that infernal current gave one no rest at all.

I had been given special instructions to be on the look out for any U-boats lying doggo on the bottom, and I wondered what would happen when we met. I rather imagined that had such a thing happened, the commander of the sub. would have sent his vessel straight at the cables and air-tubes above my head—and if that had happened this book would certainly never have been written. However, I never saw a sign of one, and eventually this rather grisly job came to an end.

Soon after this the *Euryalus* was moved over to

Suvla Bay, and here my first job was to repair a 'K' lighter, which had been sunk by Turkish shell-fire. Lighters of this type were badly needed by our people at the moment, and so a good deal of trouble was taken to refloat any that were sunk.

In this case the lighter had been beached, and was pretty well high and dry at low tide. She was also well within range of the Turkish guns, and so the repairs had to be done at night.

We got to work on her, and patched the hole in her side. We bolted an iron plate over the outside of the hole, and put a wooden patch on the inside, making her water-tight so that she could be pumped out and then refloat.

We worked like niggers on this job all night, and dawn found us on the point of finishing—so near to it, indeed, that it seemed a sin and a shame to leave the job at such a stage, and so we carried on hoping to goodness the Turkish gunners wouldn't spot us.

But what a hope . . . ! No sooner was the light strong enough to aim by than with a *whoo* and a *whoe* a shell came over and burst only a few yards away. Nevertheless, we got the last screw in, somehow, and then made a break for the boats. I have never climbed into my boat in full diving-rig with such enthusiastic celerity as I did on that occasion, for by this time the shells were dropping all round us.

I was mighty glad to get aboard once more—for though I don't know why, for some reason I have always had a decided antipathy to the idea of stopping anything in the nature of high-explosive while in my diving suit.

Before the day was out I was down again. The job this time was dismantling the engines and

taking them out of some of the small boats that had been sunk—a very trying job under water.

However, after a short spell of this we were sent off to a new base, Mitylene, in the Greek Archipelago.

Here, although there was plenty of diving work to do on the harbour boom-defence, there was also some spare time to be got, and a chance to stretch one's legs ashore sometimes for an hour or two.

It was during one of these 'off-spells' that I had a queer little adventure. I was lounging around on the rocky beach and smoking my pipe, when I became aware of the fact that I was not alone. Sounds from behind a group of rocks announced that there was someone else about.

Fired by curiosity I quietly approached, and came upon as strange a scene as one was likely to find outside a fairy story.

Behind the rocks there was a small natural pool of sea-water, left by the ebbing tide, and beside this stood a woman. I call her a woman, though her age was uncertain. From what I have seen of Greek women since, and the way they develop, I rather fancy now that she was a good deal younger than I had thought at the time.

She was certainly a very picturesque figure, as she worked busily at some task invisible to me from the angle at which I stood, but which was plainly connected with two zinc buckets, which were placed one on either side of her.

She wore a sailor's blue guernsey, from which she had cut the sleeves close to the shoulders, and a short skirt, little more than a kilt in fact, of some material that had once been a bright scarlet, but which was now very faded with sun and weather. Her arms, I noted, were soft and rounded, and her brown legs, innocent

of stockings or even socks, very shapely. She moved with that extraordinary grace which seems peculiar to the Greek women—a sort of undulating rhythm of movement which is apt to make a man's heart beat faster.

Her head was bare, and her dark hair—rather unusual in a Greek girl—hung around her face in an untidy profusion of tight little curls.

Altogether, from the back view, she appeared decidedly attractive, and I made up my mind to have a look at her frontways, so to speak.

So I moved forward, and as I drew nearer—she was, apparently, too absorbed in her job to hear me—I saw what it was she was doing. And I may say it gave me quite a shock, for it somehow seemed a ghoulish task, with a strong suggestion of witchcraft about it.

Her two pails were full of a wriggling mass of small octopi, and she was picking these unpleasant creatures out, one by one, and after killing each with a deft stab from a long steel skewer, she cut off the 'cheek-bags,' in which they carry their supply of black fluid, which they squirt in times of danger.

She then plunged her hand into the brute as though it was a sort of glove, and neatly turned it inside out, and then, after cleaning and washing it in the pool, she tossed it aside on to a heap of its brothers, which she had evidently previously subjected to the same process. She then took out another and started work on that.

It certainly was one of the most horrid-looking performances I have ever witnessed—or, at any rate, so I thought at the time, probably because it seemed so incongruous to see this rather picturesquely charming young woman engaged on such a job.

I suppose I must have made some sort of a noise, or, maybe, she could feel the intensity of my regard. Anyway, all of a sudden she swung round on me, holding her murderous skewer in one hand and a wriggling, squirming little octopus in the other.

Then I saw that her back had not belied her. If not actually a beautiful face, it was certainly an attractive one. It was what I can only describe as heart-shaped, that is to say an oval, with a delicately pointed chin and the hair growing a little down in the centre of the forehead like a sort of peak. Her skin was good, and the faint flush that showed through the brownness of her cheeks was very attractive. She had a rather large and very red mouth, and in her dark eyes there was, in the moment when she first regarded me, a sort of wild-animal look—the expression of an animal suddenly startled, and fearing danger. She looked as though she were ready either to bolt like a hare, or to attack me like a wild cat on the slightest provocation.

But after a moment, as she took in details of my appearance, that look changed.

She suddenly favoured me with a wide and expansive smile, two rows of white and perfectly even teeth flashing as she did so.

"'Ullo, 'ullo!" she greeted me. "You Ingleech, eh?"

I nodded, smiling back at her.

"Yes, I'm English, right enough!" I admitted.

"Aha!" cried she, with a pretty little pout. "You Ingleech see-lor, eh?"

"That's right!" I nodded again.

She burst into a sudden laugh, and waved her wriggling octopus at me, as she sang in a softly

tuneful voice, and in very broken English, the opening line of the chorus of a popular music-hall song :

*'Every nice girl loves a sailor . . . !'*

"I hope so!" I grinned.

But this seemed a little beyond her.

"You 'ope-zo . . . ?" She stared at me from under her neatly pencilled brows, and for the first time I became aware of a rather queer expression in her eyes, that made me, somehow, feel a bit uncomfortable. Then she gave up puzzling over my cryptic rejoinder, and suddenly smiled again.

"Me—Madonna!" she told me, or that was what I thought she said.

I was a trifle startled at that. With her skewer and her octopus, and her ensanguined hands, she hardly gave one the impression of a Madonna, I thought.

"You—Madonna . . . ?" I put it like a question.

She shook her head.

"No—no! Sillee . . . ! Me Mad—mad—mad . . . !" Here she tapped her forehead significantly with the point of her skewer. "Me Mad Anna!"

"Oh!" I gasped, a trifle taken aback. Still, 'Mad Anna' certainly sounded more like it—especially in view of that queer look in her eyes!

"Who you?" she asked, tapping me on the chest with the point of her skewer—it gave me quite a shock for the moment, for I had a vision of her treating me as she would an octopus.

"Oh, me? My name is Harry," I told her.

She repeated it over to herself, looking at me mischievously all the time—only as she said it it sounded like 'Hurree—Hurree . . . !'

And that seemed to give her an idea, for she remarked, hastily :

"Me hurree, too—lots work . . . !"

She deftly transfixed the squirming octopus, and a moment later was turning it inside out. I watched the operation, with no great pleasure.

"What do you do that for?" I asked her, indicating another wriggling thing she had taken from the pail.

"Whaffor . . . ?" She stared at me for a moment with big eyes, then laughed again. "Oh, make eats—verree good, eh?"

"Is it?" I asked, dubiously. "I shouldn't have thought so—but, of course, I don't know. Never tasted it!"

"You not taste, eh?" she asked, after turning the statement over in her mind for a moment. "You must taste heem—verree good, eh?"

And she smacked her pretty lips and rubbed her stomach in vigorous pantomime.

Then she said, again :

"You must taste! You wait a minute—then you taste, eh?"

With that she commenced to work at great speed, and in a little while had all her octopi killed and cleaned. I stood by and watched her with rather mixed feelings. She certainly was a very charming girl, and she was the first girl I had spoken to for a long time. But I could hardly see myself masticating raw octopus, even to please her! Even the smallest of the beastly things is a pretty revolting sight to a diver, anyway.

But when she had finished she threw the cleaned creatures back into the pails, and then laughingly offered me one of them.



"You carry!" said she. "You come see—come taste! Verree good, eh?"

And with that she was off across the beach at a pace, leaving me to follow. Which I did without hesitation, determined to see the end of the adventure, if equally determined that I would *not* eat octopus.

Presently we came to a tumble-down hut, and into this she led me. It was roughly furnished—there was a pallet in one corner and a table in another, with a three-legged stool in between. But there was a back door to the hut, and outside it a large iron tank, with a fire underneath it, from which steam was coming.

She turned the octopi out on to the table, and cut them into sections with a knife. When she had a bucketful, she went out and turned it into the tank, from which there came a hissing sound.

"Oliveoil!" she informed me, as though it was a single word. "Boilem up! Verree good—verree nice!"

She busied herself with more of the creatures.

Presently, when she considered the things were cooked, she hooked a piece out on a sort of iron toasting-fork, and, when it had cooled, handed it to me.

"Now, you taste 'im!" she ordered. "You see—verree good, eh?"

I rather hesitatingly took the proffered piece of 'devilfish' in my hand, and smelt it. It certainly smelled good.

She laughed at me:

"Go on!" she urged. "You eat 'im!"

Seeing no way out of it, and not being certain that her madness might not take a violent turn if she

were thwarted, I put it in my mouth, prepared to spit it out again on the instant. But I didn't. For I have seldom tasted any fish that was quite so sweet and tasty as was that piece of octopus boiled in olive oil. I can only describe it by saying that the flavour was a sort of mixture of pork, veal, and turbot, with a dash of salmon about it as well.

When I had partially recovered from my surprise at the remarkable taste of that titbit, I glanced at Mad Anna, to find her regarding me with the most comic expression of seriousness I have ever seen on an adult face (you see a similar one sometimes on that of a very small child)—eyes very wide, mouth slightly open, head a little on one side.

"O-oooh!" said I, emphatically. "Verree good—verree nice . . .!" And I smacked my lips and rubbed my tummy in imitation of her own actions a little before.

She laughed delightedly, and clapped her hands in child-like glee.

"More? Some more, eh?"

"Not half!" I agreed, vulgarly.

She produced a couple of bowls, and filled them with the juicy scraps. Then we sat, side by side, on her table (the seat of my pants smelt of fish for weeks afterwards), and fed each other with pieces of octopus, talking and laughing like a couple of kids.

When we had finished I gave her a cigarette, which she smoked with great gusto.

Then an idea struck me. I pointed to the tank, where another lot of devil-fish was cooking, and asked:

"You eat all that?"

My word, how she laughed. She seemed to think

it the greatest joke in the world. When at last she could speak again she answered me.

"No eat—only some. Me take . . ." she waved her hand, vaguely indicating the rest of the world. "Me take—sell. Get moneys!"

Well, I thought to myself, there are certainly more ways than one of making a living.

I never saw Mad Anna again, but the next time I went down (I happened to know where to find them) I collected several pailfuls of small octopi, and cooked them for the mess, in olive oil. And, in spite of a good many somewhat derogatory, not to say rude, remarks from members of the mess *before* the meal, I got a decided pat on the back *after* it.

A fellow diver, apart from his physical enjoyment of the novel dish, found a strong spiritual kick in it as well.

"This is where I get my own back!" he told us. "I've had two or three of these little fellows' big brothers try to eat *me*, and now I'm eating *them*. It only shows you, don't it . . .?"

## CHAPTER XV

### WHERE THE SHARK AND THE JELLY-FISH PLAY

IT seemed that our real business at Mitylene was to cruise around on the look-out for Austrian submarines, and we did this for quite a while, but never got a sight of one.

So eventually, under fresh orders, off we went to the Gulf of Arabia, to assist in some operations about to be carried out by an officer known as Lawrence of Arabia (his name then was by no means the household word it has become since).

The work, when we got to it, consisted mainly of pier-building, and other work connected with the landing of men, stores, and guns with ease and speed.

There was, of course, plenty of diving work in connection with the pier-building, and divers were at a premium.

Before I went down first time I got a special warning :

“ See that your knife’s sharp, Bruce—and keep your weather-eye open for sharks. They just swarm around here, and they want watching, I can tell you ! ”

This was comforting news ! The shark is one of the greatest of the diver’s terror, for, apart from the possibility of it attacking the diver himself, one snap of those terrible jaws on an air-tube and it’s a case of ‘ good-bye, diver, good-bye ! ’

Before I went down I got a few hints about sharks—as, for instance, to remain dead still if one comes right up to investigate you, in which case, taking you for some inanimate object of unpleasant-tasting rubber and metal, he will usually swim away. But at the slightest sign of the beast turning on his back—out with your knife and rip his belly up, or you're a goner!

And, sure enough, about the third time down I suddenly became conscious of a great shadow floating just above my head. I managed to look up, and there was a really big shark—about nine foot from head to tail, I should estimate—gravely inspecting my breast-rope.

'Hullo,' said he to himself. 'Here's a line with something on the end of it! And a line with something on the end of it usually means a tasty toothful—only you've got to dodge the hook!'

And down he came to see what sort of bait was on the end of that line.

I fancy the scene that ensued must have looked funny—especially if anyone could have seen the expression on my face inside that diving-helmet, I should imagine.

For with a flick of his tail and a lunge of his body, down comes the great brute until he's standing almost nose-to-nose with me—only, thank goodness, with the glass of the helmet in between us! Anyway, his ruthless eye and his wicked-looking jaws were so close that I had to squint to look him properly in the face—though why I wanted to do that I don't know, unless I had some vague notion of quelling him by sheer power of the eye, as the lion-tamers do their lions.

Whether I succeeded in doing this or not I have

no means of telling, but the fact remains that, after an inspection lasting several seconds, but seeming to me like ten years or so, His Nibs gives a flirt of his great tail and off he goes, to seek more worthy prey.

*Phew!* It isn't often one sweats inside a diving-dress and under water, but after that encounter I felt for a few minutes as though I'd been in a Turkish bath—only a cold one!

Actually on this occasion I never had a fight with any of the myriad sharks there were about, but I never felt really happy and comfortable while I was down amongst them.

One very interesting sight I did see, confirming a story I had often heard told and which I had always regarded as something of a legend.

It was apparently breeding-time with the sharks, and there were plenty of mothers around still looking after their families of youngsters.

On one occasion I saw one of these swimming towards me, and a few feet above my head. She was a six-footer, and at sight of her I remained quite still. With her she had her family of seven—they were tailing along behind her, and were, I should say, about eight inches to a foot in length (it is difficult to estimate sizes under water).

Suddenly, when she was a few yards away from me, something seemed to startle the mother. It may have been me, or it may have been something else, I have no means of telling.

But whatever it was she whipped round to face her progeny, and at the same time opened her great mouth, whereupon one by one the youngsters swam into those cavernous jaws and disappeared.

Then the old lady turned round again, to face whatever trouble might be coming to her, and

remained quite still, and apparently very much on the *qui vive*, for quite a long time. Finally, assured that either the danger, whatever it might have been, was past or had never existed, except in her excited maternal imagination, she gave a sigh of relief (at least, I imagine she did—actually I neither saw nor heard it) and then opened her mouth and gave a sort of wriggle over the whole of her body, whereupon the progeny were projected, one by one, back into the world once more, apparently none the worse for their temporary incarceration.

It was certainly a very interesting sight, though I could have been more absorbed in it if I had been sure that Mother Shark would not attack me at any moment !

The coolies working ashore used to set great store by catching smaller sharks, cooking them, and eating them. They appeared to regard them as a great delicacy, but I couldn't see much in them myself. Tough, and not very tasty—quite different from the octopi of Mad Anna.

Meanwhile the work of building piers and landing-stages went on apace. Some difficulty, however, was experienced in getting the necessary material for the latter, until someone hit on the bright wheeze of sending expeditions to various mosques in the vicinity and, having cleared out the resident community, if any, of blowing them up with a gentle charge of dynamite, and then transporting the stone of which they had been built back to the scene of operations.

Our next move was to the Persian Gulf, and we had hardly got there when we developed some mysterious trouble with our condensers, which I was sent down to investigate.

I found the main inlets covered and clogged by what appeared to be masses of some jelly-like substance, which, when I went to clear it away with the only tools available at the moment—my bare hands—I found to be capable of inflicting a vicious and painful sting.

It was then that I suddenly realized what I had to deal with. What I had taken for some jelly-like submarine growth was, in fact, a cluster of enormous jelly-fish !

This caused me to look about me, and then I saw that the water was literally infested with these rather nauseous creatures—hundreds and hundreds of them, floating about like semi-transparent blue Rugby footballs. I have never seen, or even thought of, such an army of jelly-fish in my life, and I must say that the sight of them made me feel rather sick. They were to make me feel sicker before I was done with them !

Almost as fast as I cleared them away from the condenser inlets more came along to clog them up. Finally I went up again and advised that the only thing to do was to make wire-screens, to cover the inlets and keep the brutes clear.

This wheeze was adopted and in due course I went down again to fix the screens. I had just completed the job, and was preparing to ascend again, when suddenly something seemed to go wrong with my outlet valve. I put my hand up to it, and found a sticky, glutinous mass there, covering it, which, as I went to remove it, stung me.

It was one of those damned jelly-fish !

And then, before I knew what was happening, I seemed to be snowed under by the beastly things. They wrapped themselves round my helmet,



obscuring my view through the glass, covered my inlet valve, and stuck themselves all over my body and limbs.

For a moment, so nauseating was the experience, I came near to being sick inside my helmet. Next I was on the verge of panicking—the most fatal thing a diver can do under water.

But I forced myself to face the situation sanely, and realized that the one really important thing was to keep my inlet valve clear. I did this with one hand, while with the other I gave the urgent signal on my air-tube: ‘Haul me up!’—and even while I was doing that the cold, jellified masses were wrapping themselves round my hand.

Anyway, up I went, and emerged into the sunlight and air with a host of the beastly things still clinging to me, and feeling almost ready to faint from sheer nausea.

I have been informed since, by people qualified to speak about such things, that the jelly-fish has no brain, no eyes or nose, and no means of locomotion, and that what had actually happened was that some slight submarine current had drifted a school of the creatures upon me, when, upon touching any part of my body, they had instinctively clung. And this, I have no doubt, is the real explanation, but at the time I was convinced that I had been the object of an organized attack by a school of jelly-fish, probably enraged by the fact that I had prevented them from occupying their apparently favourite positions over the condenser holes.

This may sound ridiculous, but I can tell you that I used to get the horrors at night-time thinking of the beastly things.

And the worst of it was that those wire screens, or cages, did not have entirely the desired effect, and I had to go down from time to time and clean them off.

I never did it without a shudder, and I am quite sure that at the time I would rather have faced giant sharks or octopods than jelly-fish. For that matter I can't even see an inoffensive white one floating about by the sea-shore even now without a slight feeling of sickness.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CINDERELLA AND THE SHARK

**D**URING our stay in the Persian Gulf we were several times in action—mostly small matters of bombarding coastal towns and villages, with no incidents worth writing about.

Except that on one occasion we had a Royal visitor in the shape of a minor Eastern potentate, with whom, for some reason, the British Government were anxious to keep on good terms.

He was received on board with the utmost ceremony, and was shown round the ship, in which he took the greatest interest.

But something of a situation arose when it was found that he fully expected, as part of his day's outing, to have a few words with His Majesty King George of England on the telephone.

Efforts to explain to him that this was impossible, given through the medium of the interpreter, quite plainly aroused his Dusky Majesty's worst suspicions. For some political reasons, he considered, he was deliberately being kept from having a few words with his brother King—and this after he had learnt up several suitable sentences in English. Excuses were no use to him. He had been credibly informed (how someone had been pulling his leg!) that every British warship had telephonic connection direct with Buckingham Palace, and if he wasn't permitted to

speak to the King of Great Britain, then he was prepared to be bitterly and hopelessly offended.

Only one thing to do, and those in charge of His Nibs did it, with admirable presence of mind. They got on the telephone to the ship's exchange, where I happened to answer the 'phone.

"Who is that speaking?" came the query.

"C.P.O. Bruce, sir!"

"Very well, now, listen . . .!" The situation was rapidly explained to me, and I was informed that in a moment the Royal visitor would speak to me, under the impression that he was talking to King George. I was to answer him in a kindly and gracious manner.

I was a trifle flummoxed.

"But—but what am I to say to him, sir?"

"It doesn't matter what you say. He can't understand a word of English, except one or two he's learnt up for the occasion, and which he'll fire off at you right away. It's the *tone* that counts. Sound as though you're rather condescendingly polite and friendly. Now, stand by, I'm going to put him on the line . . .!"

And next moment a rather quavery, high-pitched voice sounded in my ear.

"You there? You there? Is that His Most Gracious Majesty King George the Fifth?"

To which I made immediate answer:

"That's the ticket, old cockalorum! I'm His Majesty all right, and I hope your own blooming Majesty is in the pink?"

"Dat is good—I am honoured! I trust your Majesty is quite well?"

"Absolutely top-hole, old cock-spadger—except for me pore feet and a touch of housemaid's knee.

And I trust your Royal Majesty's feeling just the same as this leaves me at present, thanking you for your kind inquiry, and all that sort of rot!"

"Dat is good! Good-bye-ee. God save the King! Good-bye-ee!"

"And the same to you with knobs on, old son! Good-bye-ee. And God Save the Kings twice. Good-bye!"

On that the exchange of civilities ended, and I was later informed that the chocolate-coloured potentate was delighted with his conversation, and considered that his Brother of Great Britain had been most friendly. And that he kept muttering to himself: 'Pore feet . . .! Pore feet . . .!' these words seeming to have impressed themselves on his memory for some reason!

Anyway, he departed as happy as a grig, fully convinced that he had really had a personal telephonic talk with King George V.

At Bushive we ran into a bit of excitement when a fully loaded collier caught fire. Coal was at a premium in that part of the world, and the order went forth that the cargo must be salvaged, somehow.

I don't know why I got included in the salvage crew, but I suppose they thought a blacksmith and diver ought to be a useful man on such a job. Anyway, I found myself with a gas-mask and a shovel, working like a fiend in the finest imitation of hell I've encountered yet.

The heat was terrific, and but for the gas-masks the smoke would have laid us out in no time. From time to time they played hoses on us to keep us from completely cooking, and also to stop us from catching alight, I suppose.

Working in reliefs, it took the whole of one day

and the best part of the night to empty her, and for a considerable part of the time I was working up to my waist in a mixture of coal-dust and water. By the time we had her empty, and her blazing remnants had finally sunk, I was utterly and completely exhausted, and after a rough wash-down, fell asleep in my tracks and slept like one of the dead for just as long as they'd let me—which wasn't half long enough.

It was shortly after this that we got a bit of back-wash from the capture of General Townsend at Kut. The story of this affair is well known to everyone in these days, so I will not recapitulate it, except as it affected myself and the other *Euryalus* men.

One day at Basra, Admiral Wemyss called for a volunteer crew to make an endeavour to get a ship-load of stores up to General Townsend. Practically every man on board gladly volunteered, and the crew was carefully selected on the score of their individual reputation and efficiency.

In due course the store ship started on her fatal voyage—fatal because she might have succeeded in reaching her destination, but for the fact that she ran aground and in that helpless state was finally captured by the enemy, after a stubborn resistance on the part of our fellows, many of whom were killed, including the young officer in command.

Eventually an exchange of prisoners was effected, and our men, all the wounded amongst them, were packed into Anglo-Persian Oil Company's barges, and allowed to drift down the river—the tragic result being that, by the time they got down to Basra, nearly all the wounded had succumbed. This tragedy made us all feel pretty sick, as may be imagined.

A little later, patrolling the Persian Gulf, we came upon H.M.S. *Britomart* in trouble. She had run aground, and was making water in the hold. So I was sent down to see if I could locate the trouble.

I spent a long time under water, but the only outward sign I could detect was one or two polished plates which meant that they had been scraped by something and probably 'started.' Anyway, she eventually went off under her own steam, and arrived at Bombay without mishap.

At this time we were, I think, the biggest warship in those parts, and our nine-point-two and six-inch guns earned us the deepest respect from the natives. But what seemed to have an even greater effect on them were our searchlights, for they decided that we had evil spirits aboard who possessed the power of turning night into day at will. So, wherever we went, we had very little trouble with the natives.

It was decided that the crew had earned a little bit of recreation, so we put into Muscat, and were allowed to go ashore and stretch our legs. One party of us at least had considerable fun by climbing some distance up the big mountain, equipped with pails of whitewash and brushes, and there painting the name of our ship "Euryalus" along the side of it in huge letters, so that it could be seen by passing ships for many miles. Sailors are always more or less children.

A little later we were back at Basra again, and here a very curious incident occurred—it seemed to me a great joke at first, but later I was not quite so appreciative of the humour of it.

The submarine scare was at its height. One never knew when or where the confounded U-boats would turn up, and all ships, men-of-war or other-

wise, were constantly on the *qui vive*. And a very wearing business it was, too.

I have heard people talk of the strain of air-raids—the complete helplessness of the bombed people down on terra firma, and the wear and tear on the nerves of never knowing what might bring the relentless raiders over.

Nor do I doubt but that it was very trying. But I feel sure it was nothing to being in a ship, with nothing beneath one but a few miles of water and Davy Jones's locker, and knowing that at any moment, and *without the slightest warning*, there might come a terrific explosion, and the ship, with half the bottom blown out of her, would be sinking almost like a stone.

It was always there, that strain, by day and night. During the day almost everyone, in addition to the official look-outs, would be scanning the surface of the sea at every spare moment in the fear of sighting one of those sinister periscopes. And at night it was worse, for one could see nothing, and the roar and shock of the explosion itself was likely to be the one and only warning one would get of approaching death.

Small wonder, then, that men got 'nervy.'

False alarms were frequent. I have seen the whole crew at action-stations on account of a suspicious-looking piece of driftwood, and on one occasion fire was actually opened on what certainly looked very much like a periscope sticking up amid the waves—but which turned out to be merely a small spar with a weight on one end which caused it to float in a perpendicular position.

But the scare we had at Basra that afternoon beat them all.



It must have been about three p.m. when the look-out called the attention of the bridge to some queer-looking objects showing up above the surface of the water. And within a few moments of that the powers-that-were were fully convinced that we were being attacked, not by one submarine, but by a whole flotilla of them !

They seemed to be in some sort of formation, and were moving steadily down on us from the shore. Each of the periscopes, as we all believed them to be, projected from six inches to a foot out of the water, and on the top of each one of them there was a sort of thickening, or bulge. There was no question of them being upended spars, or anything like that, though they were certainly queer-looking objects.

Instantly the order for 'action-stations' was passed, and all was bustle and activity throughout the ship. The word went round that there was a fleet—some said a hundred, some fifty strong—of submarines coming down on us, and we all felt a bit grim. For even allowing plenty of scope for the usual exaggeration at such times, there obviously wasn't much chance for us. In fact, there just wasn't any chance at all—not the hope of a snowball in hell ! All there was left to us, was to sell our lives as dearly as possible.

I got into fire-fighting kit, for as I have previously explained it is the diver's job to act as ship's fire-brigade when she goes into action. The trouble was that it was such an inactive job, and I didn't at all fancy the idea of being drowned like a rat in a trap without a chance of even trying to get a shot in at the slayers. . . .

But there it was—it couldn't be helped. As it takes all sorts to make a world, so it takes all sorts

to man a ship, and I was unlucky, that was all. Still, I didn't like it. . . .

I and my mate talked gloomily on these lines. Then he suddenly suggested :

"Here, I've got a pair of decent glasses in my box. What say I go and get 'em, and we sneak along to yon port and have a look-see, eh?"

"There'll be the devil to pay if we're caught!" I objected, doubtfully.

My mate laughed.

"Looks like there'll be the devil to pay anyway!" he grunted. "And there'll be no courts-martial in hell, I reckon. You hold the fort—I'm off!"

He disappeared, and in a few minutes returned with quite a good pair of binoculars. We then committed the heinous offence of leaving our stations to go and have a look at the approach of Death!

But we did it one at a time, and he, as owner of the glasses, claimed first look. He came back gloomier than ever.

"It's a true bill," he announced. "I can see those damned periscopes quite plainly. I counted forty-eight of 'em, and they seem to be in some sort of formation. The only queer thing about it is that they don't seem to be moving under their own power—by the look of it they're just drifting down on us with the current."

It seemed to me there was some sort of hope in that, because it certainly wasn't the sort of way U-boats generally behaved. Their method was to make a quick dash in, do their job, and then retire to a safe distance to watch the end of their victims.

It struck me that perhaps they had been abandoned for some reason, or had actually got adrift from their moorings at some secret lair or other,

without anyone on board. But then, of course, they wouldn't have been submerged. . . . Anyway, I extracted considerable hope from the fact that they were drifting, and not moving under their own power. It also struck me that forty-eight submarines all of a bunch was rather a lot. . . .

"Give us those glasses," I demanded, quickly. "Let's see what I can make of them!"

I ran to the port and swept the sea with the glasses. I had no difficulty in picking up the objects that had caused the alarm, and they certainly looked as much like the periscopes of submarines as anything I have ever seen. Also I had no difficulty in counting precisely forty-eight of them.

Yet, the more I looked at them, the more I became convinced that they were not submarines at all. And then something that struck me convinced me completely.

As my mate had said, they were in some sort of formation. But when I came to analyse that formation I saw what it amounted to. The things were in groups of four, and those four kept at perfectly and absolutely even distances from each other. And those distances were too short to make it possible for them to be submarines, even though they had been fastened together, stem and stern! I wondered what they could be, then, if not submarines, and almost immediately it came to me. Tables . . .! That's what they were—tables, floating with the flat part under water, and the legs sticking up. . . .

The relief was so great that I almost laughed and shouted aloud. I believe I actually did chuckle.

Then, with startling suddenness, one of our smaller guns spoke. I saw a spurt of water rise

quite close to one of those groups of four 'periscopes' (or table-legs). A direct hit! There was an upheaval on the water—something like a minor explosion seemed to have occurred—and for a moment something very queer-looking showed on the surface. And then the four upright objects sank together, and disappeared from view!

That settled it in my mind. One small shell could never have sunk four submarines, and even if it could they would certainly not have sunk so quickly. . . .

I hastened back to my mate with the glad news, and a few minutes later it was clear that the officers shared my conviction. We were dismissed from action-stations, and almost immediately afterwards we lowered a pinnace, which went to investigate the phenomenon.

It came back to report that what we had taken to be a flotilla of submarines was actually a herd of dead mules, floating with their bodies beneath the surface and their stiffened legs sticking up so that the hooves and about twelve inches of leg were showing above the wavelets . . . !

Lord, how we laughed when we learned what it was! But he laughs longest who laughs last, and my laughter didn't last very long.

For it was decided that, in more ways than one, those defunct mules represented a menace to shipping, and so they must be sunk. And the ship's diver—your humble—was allotted the honourable but disgusting task of sinking them.

I should have liked to suggest that they could far more easily and quickly be sunk by gun-fire, and afforded the gunners a bit of useful target-practice. But, alas, I knew there was a war on, and a conse-

quent economy campaign in ammunition, as well as other things. . . .

So I just had to make the best of it, and get busy. And a filthy job it was, too ! The mules had been dead some time. Their bellies were all blown out by accumulated gas, and that kept them afloat. It was my job to go down and rip their distended bellies up with my knife, when the gas immediately rushed out through the orifice, and they sank to the bottom.

That doesn't sound so bad when written, but actually it was a difficult as well as a revolting business. I will not go into details, but I daresay the imagination of the reader will tell him that a mule which has been in the water for something like three weeks is not an entirely pleasant thing to handle.

And when it comes to eleven of them . . . ! Well, for once I was extremely glad that inside a diving-suit one is completely cut off from outside smells !

Our next port of call was Aden, and we quite literally sailed right into trouble there. For entering the harbour we ran right into some submerged wire, which promptly fouled our starboard propeller.

Of course I had to go down and examine the damage right away, and as a preliminary I was greatly cheered by the information given me about sharks.

"Well, old son, when you've been down here you'll be able to say you've seen a real shark—that's if you ever come up again, of course !"

"Sharks, I should say so !" put in another Job's comforter. "Why, man, all those you've ever seen as yet will look like tiddlers against the fellows here !

They're as big as most whales! One comfort, you'll have roomy quarters when you get inside!"

"I hear they found one dead on the shore a little while ago. And when they cut it open they found inside its guts no less than six divers' helmets and over two hundred yards of air-tubing. They reckon the poor beast died of indigestion!"

Of course, I took all this from whence it came, but I did know the reputation Aden has for really fine specimens of the man-eating shark, and so I didn't feel too comfortable as I went down.

I got on to the propeller, and found it in a nasty snarl of wire, but decided it could be got off without a tremendous lot of trouble. I got busy with wire-cutters, and had just about cleared it when I slipped and nearly fell, and in the struggle one of my weighted boots—the right one—came off and went down to the bottom. It had evidently not been fastened on securely when I was dressed.

As a result of this I found I could not keep myself in an upright position properly—the best I could achieve was a sort of bad imitation of Anton Dolin doing a ballet posture—one foot on the ground and the other sort of floating gracefully around.

So down I went after my boot, but found the bottom muddy, and the heavy boot evidently sunk in it somewhere.

I must have looked a pretty queer object standing there on one foot, and all lopsided—and so evidently thought a fine specimen of a ground-shark, who decided that, odd-looking or not, I should probably make a tasty meal.

Luckily I saw him coming, and so was ready for him—but what a position to be in! I could only move by a sort of hopping motion, and I was all on

one side, like a sailing-ship blown nearly on to her beam-ends.

It looked very much to me as though I were 'for it!'

However, I got my knife out, and did some quick thinking. In the ordinary way the diver is under a double handicap in an encounter of this sort. The shark must not only be kept from biting his body, but also from fouling or biting his air-tube, which means just as certain death. I, owing to the loss of my boot, was under a triple handicap.

I took a hop or two forward, so that my air-tube was pulled well behind me, and thus met him halfway, which seemed to surprise him a little, for he gave a swirl of his tail and doubled in his tracks, so that for a moment I thought I had frightened him off.

But no such luck, he turned again and came back to the attack, and once more I went forward to meet him, floundering like a crippled bird, and horribly handicapped by the loss of my boot and my semi-inverted position.

I knew what I should have to do, and it was a matter of quick and accurate timing. I didn't have a chance to feel really scared, for I knew that my life depended on my keeping an absolutely clear head, and concentrating entirely on the job in hand.

This time he meant business. He came right at me and then commenced to turn on his back for the bite. I signalled hastily 'more air,' and then, the moment I saw the mottled white of his belly, I drove my knife home and simultaneously closed my outlet-valve.

He lashed the water with his tail, and a great gout of blood came from the wound I had made as

I went upwards, but all too slowly. However, when he had collected himself for the next attack, I was above him, and as he came up at me I opened the valve again, and also dug two fingers of my knife-hand into my tight cuff, pulling it open to let more air escape.

As a result of this manœuvre, I sank as he rose. His body flashed past me, and so closely that I was able to reach out and rip at his belly with my knife.

The stroke went right home, and as he madly threshed the water it was reddened with his blood. The next minute a terrific jerk on my air-pipe threw me right off my balance, and I really thought it was all up. I thought the beast had got a grip on it in his death agony, and would bite it through . . . !

I was correct up to a point. It was his death-agony, all right—but it was his tail that had hit the tube, not his jaws !

And as I lay on my back, staring stupidly upwards, I got a glimpse of my late adversary's long body, almost still now, turning over and over as it slowly rose to the surface, with its entrails hanging in festoons from the slit in its belly. . . .

I got on to my feet—or, rather on to my *foot*—again, and then, realizing that I could neither climb the shot-rope nor get up the ladder without my missing boot, I signalled for them to haul me up.

Now that it was all over I was in a sweat of sheer funk, and I must have looked a bit green when they pulled me into the boat and took my front-glass off.

When I explained all that had happened, the most sympathy I got was being called a so and so fool for losing my boot, and told that I was lucky to be alive, because it was more than I deserved. They're a sympathetic lot in the Navy !



But the unkindest cut of all was when I learned that I must go down again, right away, and recover that boot. We couldn't afford to lose it, in war-time, they told me.

And I'm going to admit that, after my recent experience, I funk'd going down there again as much as I've ever funk'd anything in my life.

However, there was nothing to be done but obey orders. Another right boot was found for me, and put on—and then I got a little bit of my own back, seeing that it was properly adjusted and secured, and telling them just what I thought about their previous effort in that direction.

But they had the last word, after all, because just as they were screwing on my front glass, while I stood (trembling like an aspen leaf) half-submerged on the ladder, someone called out in a mincing, treble voice :

“And so pretty little Cinderella went off to look for her dainty little shoe . . . !”

And it was to the howl of laughter that followed this witticism that the glass was screwed home, and I went slowly and reluctantly down into the depths, and back to the scene of the battle.

What made it rather less of a joke was that I knew that sharks were attracted in swarms by the blood of one of their killed or injured brothers, and I quite expected to find myself landed in the midst of a school of huge man-eaters. But actually there wasn't one to be seen when I finally reached the muddy bottom.

All the same, it was a mighty nervous job finding that boot. I looked up at the faintly looming shadow of the *Euryalus's* stern, and made a rough calculation as to where the boot could have fallen.

After that I had to keep plunging my arm more than elbow-deep into the slimy mud—never knowing what my bare and unprotected hand might encounter in the process—and looking out for approaching sharks all the time . . . ! It was a quarter of an hour before I found it, and by that time I was in a muck-sweat inside my suit. But find it I did at last, after one of the worst quarter-hours I have ever spent under water—and wasn't I just glad to get back into the boat and find myself in the sunlight once more ?

But it was a long time before I lost the nickname of ' Cinderella ' !

## CHAPTER XVII

### I VISIT A FAIRY CITY

THE old *Euryalus* has many honours to her name—but so, after all, has many another British cruiser. Nevertheless, the old hooker has one distinction which, I think, is absolutely unique. She is the only British man-o'-war that has ever been told off to escort the Holy Carpet to Jeddah, for the annual ceremonies in connection therewith.

We convoyed a number of ships packed with pilgrims, and it was a wonderful sight to see them when they landed, all at prayer with their faces turned towards the setting sun.

Before we sailed away from them they had a great ceremony in honour of our Admiral, Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, in the course of which a Sacred Camel was sacrificed. I suppose to the Moslems this was all a very sacred business, but I am afraid that most of our fellows looked upon it as a sort of circus show.

We were hardly back from this jaunt when we had another Royal visitor—this time I believe, if my memory serves me right, it was the King of the Hejaz. He rolled up with an escort consisting of a small army of tribesmen, dressed in all sorts of queer uniforms, and with all kinds of weapons—long swords, spears and knives, pikes, maces, and fire-arms ranging from aged flint-locks to com-

paratively modern breach-loaders. I noticed one or two double-barrelled sporting guns amongst them, too—and as for the uniforms, there was one important officer wearing the uniform of a French *gendarme*, a general clad in a cast-off Salvation Army uniform, and another with what looked like the rig of a station-master on the old L.B. & S.C. Railway.

In this case it seems that it was considered necessary to impress the potentate with the extraordinary power and resources of the British Navy, and elaborate steps were taken accordingly. We hurriedly organized demonstrations of gunnery, searchlight drill, wireless telegraphy and what-not, and the King was duly impressed.

One of the things that impressed him most was how he was able, by pressing a button, to unfurl a flag at the masthead. I must say that it also rather puzzled me—until I tumbled to the fact that, as His Majesty pressed the button, someone behind him signalled to the Chief Yeoman of Signals, who unfurled the flag.

Wireless seemed to impress the King hardly at all, but he regarded the searchlights and the telephone as very strong magic.

And then someone thought of giving him a diving display, and of course I was selected for the job. Down I went, remained under for a quarter of an hour, and then came up again, smiling. For a moment or two the King seemed to be very impressed by this, but then he put on a knowing smile, like a kid at a conjuring show, and informed the world that he 'knew how that one was done.' Of course the man who went down in the helmet was not the same man who came back again! That man was lying,

drowned, at the bottom of the sea. And the man who came up again was another man in a similar helmet; released from some lower part of the ship and then brought quickly up through the water before he could drown.

Of course, the Admiral expressed great indignation at this—as though we should play such a low-down trick on His Majesty. Why, we wouldn't deceive him for worlds!

The King then asked if he might devise a test, and was told certainly he could. So first he came down into the boat, and had a really good look at me with my helmet off, so as to impress my features well upon his Royal mind. It was rather a queer sensation having that Royal but dusky face thrust within an inch or two of my own in the course of a minute inspection.

Anyway, his next move was to take a necklace of large and (I presume) valuable stones from his neck. He first most carefully displayed this to me, and then produced a large handkerchief, of flaming scarlet silk, in which he wrapped the necklace, and then knotted it. After which he tossed the parcel overboard and said something, laughing.

It was hastily explained to me that His Majesty had said that if I could recover that necklace, he would believe that men could walk along the bottom of the sea and live, but that if I couldn't, he should expect to have my head for it.

Instructions were given me by an officer.

"For any sake, don't come up without that necklace, Bruce!" said he. "For the old boy will most certainly demand your head if you do, and that will mean either we shall have to behead you, or we shall be plunged into what is known as 'an

international situation,' and get it right in the neck from the Admiralty!"

"Well, sir," I answered, "you may depend on me doing my best—the trouble is that some shark or other large fish may be attracted by that bright handkerchief, and swallow the lot!"

"In that case we're well in the soup," said he. "But, for the Lord's sake, go down and do your best!"

And down I went, not feeling too cheerful about it. Thank goodness it was a sandy bottom, but there were tide and currents and what-not to be taken into consideration, besides the very real chance of the jewels being swallowed by some fish, as I had suggested.

I went down the shot-rope slowly, taking careful note of the pull of the various currents as I went down, and so estimating as well as I could just about where the handkerchief with its precious contents would lie.

And, sure enough, after about ten minutes' careful search I found it, aided by the flaming scarlet of that handkerchief.

I decided not to hurry back, so I also collected for the King several shells, and some specimens of deep-sea flora, and then, having been down in all a little under the half-hour, up I went again. When I came to the surface I found the King, his immediate attendants, and our own officers all eagerly leaning over the side, they having already, of course, received the report: 'Diver coming up, sir,' from the boat.

And the relief that showed in the officers' faces when they saw that red handkerchief safe in my grip was a study.

As for the King, he was properly impressed. He examined his necklace with the greatest care, and also the handkerchief—and he almost crowed with delight over my deep-sea specimens. He also assured himself by staring at my face again that I was the same man who went down—and that was that. I think the thing that impressed him most about the power and resources of the British Navy was undoubtedly the fact that some of them had the power to walk on the bottom of the sea for half an hour and to come up, smiling and unharmed.

We must have been somewhere in the middle of the Red Sea, shortly after the incident described above, when a mishap occurred to Admiral Wemyss, which called for my assistance.

Sir Rosslyn was the possessor of a very fine telescope, which had been presented to him on some occasion or other, and of which he was very proud and fond.

Somehow or other—I never learned exactly how—when on the bridge one morning he contrived to drop it over the side, plump in the middle of the Red Sea, or thereabouts.

He was in a terrible state of concern about it, until someone suggested that the diver might be able to get it for him.

“If he can, I shall be delighted!” agreed the Admiral. “But he’ll have to volunteer. I’m not going to order him down just for my own personal convenience!”

So I was sent for, and the situation explained to me.

“Do you think you could possibly recover it for me, diver?” asked Sir Rosslyn. “As a volunteer, of course! I’m not ordering you down.”

"I'll certainly have a go at it, sir!" I replied, readily enough. Admiral Wemyss was a splendid fellow, and any member of his crew was always willing to do anything he possibly could for him.

So off I went to the doctor, and then down into the boat and into diving rig, and finally off down below.

It was my first experience of real deep-sea diving in the Red Sea, and it certainly opened my eyes a bit.

For when I got down I found myself in a wonder-land such as no fairy-tale has ever even attempted to describe. Actually, indeed, it was completely indescribable.

For I landed on the bottom in the midst of what appeared to be a veritable fairy city—a city of softly gleaming red coral, with elaborate buildings, spires, minarets, and domes galore.

So convincing was it all that I almost expected at any moment to see little people, in all the gay colours of fairy finery, come dancing out of the great buildings and hold revel before my eyes.

But if I saw no fairies, in a few moments I found myself watching a most convincing substitute for them. For, having apparently recovered from the scare of my descent, which had evidently scattered them for the time being, there presently appeared, swimming lazily through the coral maze, a host of strange and brightly coloured fish, such as I had never seen before, or even dreamed existed.

They were of all shapes and sizes, but mostly small—long, eel-like creatures, fat tubby ones, and flat-fish of the most startling shapes.

Their colours were something to marvel at—the most vivid reds, blues, and yellows, and more sober blacks and browns—some were barred, some striped,



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Their colours were something to marvel at—the most vivid reds, blues, and yellows, and more sober blacks and browns—some were barred, some striped,

some spotted—and some had what appeared to be irregular blotches of bright colour all over them. There were some with small bodies, but huge round heads, with comically protuberant eyes ; some with long, gossamer-like fins ; others with thin, writhing tentacles all over them. And as they moved slowly winding in and out the towers, domes, and minarets of the lovely red coral, they seemed to be fitting inhabitants for such a city.

For a while I stood watching them, spellbound. Then, remembering the reason for my descent, I dragged my eyes away and commenced to search for the telescope. But it soon became pretty clear to me that looking for a needle in a bundle of hay might be regarded as a soft job compared to looking for the telescope in that land of coral.

However, I determined to do my best, and I walked slowly over the ocean-bed, eagerly scanning every inch of it for a sight of the lost instrument.

As I moved along the landscape changed. Now there was white coral to be seen, as well as red, and what seemed like woods and orchards of strange-looking submarine flowers and trees.

Presently I was attracted again to my surroundings. I found myself regarding a great mass of sponges—weird things which, like jelly-fish, seem to be a sort of missing link between the vegetable and animal kingdoms of life.

Then I was attracted to a queer fish which kept on blowing itself out like a football, so that while, when deflated, it was only quite a small and insignificant-looking creature, when blown out it was quite large, and decidedly imposing. I couldn't quite make out what its idea was in performing this strange evolution—perhaps just the nature of the beast, or

possibly something to do with its method of feeding or breathing.

Suddenly, into this submarine paradise, tragedy intruded. There came a sudden disturbance in the water, and the myriad gaily coloured fishes disappeared amongst the coral as though by magic.

Then along came a half-dozen small sword-fish, going through the water at a great pace. Behind them was a larger one, and behind him another, yet larger. As they drew near to me the first one turned, and faced the second one, who was evidently the pursuer. Next moment, like a couple of medieval knights at a joust, the two were fighting.

They charged and eluded charges in the most expert manner, and in a moment or two I was as absorbed in the fight as if I was watching a human combat. In the end, as often happens, the smaller won the day. He was quicker and more agile than his bigger opponent, and able to dodge the other's onslaughts pretty effectively, so that he got in about five thrusts to the other's three. At last he had the big fellow tired from his exertions and loss of blood, and the latter elected to beat a retreat.

But the little fellow wasn't having that—he was determined that it should be a fight to the death. And so he followed his retreating antagonist, and it developed into a running fight, which I, anxious to see the end of it, followed up as well as I could.

In the end the combatants worked round in a circle, and so came back to me, and I was able to see the end of the contest, when the larger one slowly turned over on his back and his torn and shattered carcass commenced to drift slowly away and upwards. Whereupon the victor, though himself showing signs of being the worse for the fray, gave

a sort of triumphant flirt with his tail, and then sailed proudly away after his vanished smaller brethren. Or maybe 'he' was really a 'she,' and the small ones her progeny whom she was defending. I could not tell.

The fight over, the gaily coloured fish came back, and commenced their apparently aimless swimming around, and I, after watching them for a minute or two, automatically dropped my eyes to the ocean bed—and there, almost at my feet, lay the Admiral's telescope, neatly placed in between two coral spires. Luck was with me, and the fighting sword-fish had led me right to the object of my search.

All the same, I remained down long enough to collect some extra fine specimens of the red coral—as many as I could conveniently manage—and then I ascended by the usual slow stages to the boat above.

And so I was able to restore Admiral Wemyss' telescope to him, and to receive his gracious congratulations and thanks. The finding of that telescope was considered something of an achievement by all on board.

Soon after this there came an event which is always highly respected in the Navy. Christmas Day!

And a curious sort of Christmas it certainly seemed to those who, like myself, had never spent a Christmas in the tropics before. No white pall of snow over everything; no chirping robins, no holly or mistletoe, no glitter of frost. Instead of that we had the glaring sun, the cloudless blue sky, and a temperature soaring somewhere into the hundreds, even in the shade! No place for Good King Wenceslas!

However, we made the best of it, and indulged in all the time-honoured rites and ceremonies of the naval Christmas, when the youngest rating takes over duty as commander, and the oldest becomes the most junior. In each mess the youngest boy serves out rum and rations, and occasionally gives orders for a defaulter to be tried for some petty offence—which is done with the utmost hilarity.

The Captain and officers paid a ceremonious visit to each mess, inspecting the Christmas fare and tasting it as a matter of courtesy, wishing all the men a happy Christmas, and so on.

Then in the evening we all went on deck for an impromptu concert, at which I, as the best singer aboard, was in considerable request. I also gave one or two cornet solos.

Despite the heat and the strange conditions, we contrived to make it a real good Christmas, and to have a happy day, for the most part larking about like a lot of kids—which was partly due to the naturally high spirits of the British sailor, and partly, no doubt, due to the revulsion of feeling from the tragedy of the War in which we seemed to have been engaged for so long.

For this was the second Christmas of the War, and when I thought of the fellows (including myself) who had confidently expected that British troops would be in the streets of Berlin before the first one . . . ! well, it all looked very different now, and it seemed to most of us that the War would be likely enough to go on for ever.

I suppose at that particular period a great many people felt like that about it. It seemed rather as though we had always been at war, and always should be.

But just for that one day we forgot there was a war, or had ever even been so much as a rumour of one, and on deck that night we warbled all the old, old songs, beloved of the Navy since the days of Nelson and before, and some more recent music-hall ditties. But no war songs, by mutual agreement—we didn't care how far it was to Tipperary, or if anybody ever got there, or even if there was such a place, anyway.

And at nine o'clock we piped down, as happy a ship's company as existed anywhere in the world.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BACK TO HOME WATERS

**S**HORTLY after Christmas we found ourselves heading for the Indian Ocean, and eventually brought up in Bombay, where the *Euryalus* was to re-fit, and the crew, much to our delight, were billeted ashore, in a sailors' home. It was certainly good to feel the solid earth under one's feet again for more than an hour or so at a time, which gave me the thought that men were not, really, ever intended to spend years on the seas, cooped up in ships. I mentioned these thoughts to a pal of mine, who was a bit of a philosopher, and he promptly replied :

" Well, my son, if man had remained as he was *intended* to, we should still be living in caves and wearing wolf-skins—or else shinning around in the trees with the rest of the monkey tribe ! And as it seems to me that modern life, for the ordinary chap like you or me, means vegetating, anyway—well, all I can say is I'd rather turn into a bit of sea-weed than a bloody cabbage, any day ! ”

In which sentiment I was inclined to agree with him.

During this period I had little to do, once the diving-gear had been overhauled and the pumps tested, and so on. So I was able to join a party of mixed ratings who were sent up into the hills, miles



above sea-level, to 'recuperate from the strain of sea-life,' as the doctor very nicely put it. Needless to say we enjoyed every moment of it, though it sometimes struck me as being a shame that we should be having such a good time when so many poor devils had spent months and years on end in the mud and blood of Flanders.

Another thought which I mentioned to my philosophical pal, who answered flippantly :

"Sure, you're right ! 'Thank God we've got a Navy—or you and I might have been in the infantry, too !"

With which again I had to agree.

A week or two later saw us at sea once more, and cruising in the neighbourhood of Ceylon. In the harbour at Colombo I was allotted another grim job. Some poor devil had got drowned, and, as his body had not been recovered, it was thought likely that it was hung up somewhere below in the mooring-chains.

So I was sent down to inspect them all, which is, as I think I have mentioned elsewhere in this book, not the safest of jobs. However, I got through it without mishap, but I did not find the body. It had apparently been taken elsewhere by the undercurrent, which was very strong just there.

We were not long in Ceylon, but found ourselves off to the Malay Straits, escorting troops to and from the China stations.

And then came the greatest news since we first heard that War was declared. We had been away from England for two and a half years, and now we were to be sent home on leave.

There was only one sadness about it. A sailor gets to love his ship almost as much as his home, and we had been too long in the old *Euryalus* to leave her out there without a pang or two. But it had to be done, and we left her at Ismailia—and I, for one, never set eyes on her again. She never came home, but saw the rest of her service out there in the East, and was, so I understand, eventually broken up out there.

The leave boat took us by sea as far as Taranto in Italy, and from there we crossed the Alps by train—an unusual and rather trying experience for sailormen.

But in a way it wasn't so bad as normal rail travelling in England. The train went along in an almost incredibly go-as-you-please style, with frequent stops by the wayside, when we actually used to get out and pick flowers, and sometimes fruit from the orchards. The people were enormously friendly, and only too pleased to give a British tar anything he darn well wanted.

The journey through to France by rail actually took nearly a month.

But we got into France at last, where we saw abundant evidence that the War was a far grimmer business in Europe—and especially in France—than it was in the East.

Arrived at Le Havre, and then on to the boat for England, Home and Beauty. The trip across the Channel was the most nervous part of the whole business though—everyone with the wind well up about submarines. And I'll have to admit that I wasn't by any means free from anxiety myself—it would have been pretty hard lines to be sent down

to Davy Jones just as one was arriving home on leave !

But it seemed I was too lucky for that sort of thing to happen to me, as will be seen in a moment.

We landed safely at Folkestone, and then proceeded by train to Chatham. It seemed funny to see the old barracks again—and, my hat, wasn't it just cold . . . !

After a couple of days or so at Chatham, I got my leave and set off for Oxford. And this was where I was really lucky, for on the very night of the day I left, Jerry came over in force and bombed the barracks !

We did not know then, and I do not suppose we ever shall now, the official computation of the numbers killed in that disastrous raid, but I do know that it ran into some hundreds. Almost all of them were killed as they lay asleep in their hammocks, and for the most part they were so frightfully cut about and disfigured by broken glass that the majority of them were unidentifiable. The bodies were just piled in unrecognizable heaps, and buried in the same way.

On that grim day following the raid the roll was called, and every man who failed to answer to his name and who was not shown in the records to be either sick, wounded, in the cells, or on leave, was presumed dead.

Naturally, a number of mistakes occurred in these circumstances. Quite a lot of ' dead ' men eventually turned up, and I daresay a number of them who were not satisfied with a naval life did not return, and were content to remain ' dead '—at any rate so far as the Service was concerned !

When my mother told me of the raid—although the papers, of course, did not indicate how serious it actually was—when I awoke the morning after coming home on leave, I regarded myself as about the luckiest fellow I knew!

After a seven days' leave which, as you may imagine, I made the most of, I reported back to the depot at Chatham, and found that I was posted to the *Centaur*, joining up with the Harwich force.

She was a light cruiser, and carried the broad pennant of Commander (afterwards Admiral) Tyrwhitt, and service in her meant having a lively time, for Commander Tyrwhitt was then known as 'The Terror of the North Sea,' a title which he had very definitely earned.

So I was soon out in the North Sea once more, and with plenty to do—for hardly a day passed but we were in action, either fighting German drifters, or chasing the elusive submarine.

In addition to which we had plenty of mine-laying of our own to do, and various other jobs which were all part of the very arduous business of patrol duty in the North Sea.

It was during these days on the *Centaur* that I got (strangely enough, seeing how familiar they were to most people by then) my first glimpse of a Zeppelin.

Caught in the searchlights, she looked like a little silver cigar floating across the sky, and would have seemed a very pretty sight indeed, if one could detach oneself from the thought of what she meant to the lives and limbs of her helpless victims—many of whom were not even combatants. Thinking of

the recent raid on Chatham, in which I had lost so many good messmates, I felt very regretful that I could not help our gunners firing at her—but it wouldn't have made much difference anyway, since while I was on the *Centaur* she never scored anything like a direct hit on a Zepp—and neither, I think, did any other British warship.

Though we certainly did see one brought down, but that is another story, and will appear in its proper place.

It was, in its way, a great life being with the Harwich force. We were always dashing about here and there on sudden and unexpected orders, and never knew from hour to hour what was going to happen—except that there was bound to be a bit of excitement pretty well every day.

Admiral Tyrwhitt was a splendid fellow to sail under, and all the men thought the world of him. He feared nothing, and was of the stuff that the old English sea-dogs of Queen Elizabeth's time were made.

At the beginning of the War he was in command of the *Arethusa*, and of the destroyer flotillas of the First Fleet. In the *Arethusa* he harried and chased and sunk the enemy time and time again, at Heligoland, Dunkirk, and during the famous raid on Gorleston, at the raids on Yorkshire and Cuxhaven, and at the Dogger Bank. Later he transferred his broad pennant to the *Lightfoot*, the *Cleopatra* and the *Conquest* in turn, but all the time he harried and harassed the Germans with ceaseless energy and bull-dog tenacity.

Small wonder that they called him 'the Terror

of the North Sea,' and that the Germans actually put a price upon his head !

His name must have stunk in the nostrils of the Kaiser Wilhelm as that of Drake did in the nostrils of King Philip of Spain.

Like Drake, he could inspire the men under him with his own bravery and enthusiasm, and we all of us considered ourselves honoured and privileged to serve with such a man.

After the well-named *Conquest*, he transferred his broad pennant to the *Carysfort*, and then, later, to the *Centaur*.

It was in January, 1917, that we heard of a German destroyer flotilla that would be leaving the rivers for Zeebrugge during the afternoon, and Commander Tyrwhitt got his orders to go ahead full steam and intercept them.

When the order came through, about noon, we had six light cruisers, one leader, and ten destroyers ready, but reinforcements from Dover arrived a little later and when we actually put to sea we had, in all :

6 light cruisers.

2 flotilla leaders.

16 destroyers.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when we put out and headed for the open sea under full steam.

It seems—though I didn't know it until afterwards—that the flotilla we were out to intercept was the sixth, under Commander Max Schultz, and it consisted of one leader and ten destroyers, so that we were superior in numbers.

But, as the enemy had the choice of two alternative routes, the Commander had to divide our force, which tended to even things up.

Eventually even our light cruiser squadron was divided into two detachments, and we found ourselves, together with the *Aurora* and the *Conquest*, proceeding alone to a point off the North Hinder.

And as it happened we were lucky. The German commander chose a route that took him about midway between the North Hinder and the Mass, and so ran into us nicely !

This occurred about a quarter to three in the morning, when our ships were steaming in 'line ahead' formation, we, in the *Centaur*, leading.

Presently the word was passed round that enemy ships were approaching, and those of us who were in a position to do so strained our eyes through the darkness in an endeavour to catch some glimpse of the Germans.

And presently we got it—faint smudges of light, like fire-flies against the blackness of sea and sky. It was the glare from the funnels of the German destroyers.

Some tense moments followed, as those lights drew nearer and became larger and more marked. A queer feeling that at any minute, from the darkness, the roaring death of the torpedo, or the smashing, flaming death of the shell might meet us. We could do nothing but just hold our breaths and wait. Some of us were shivering, too—but that, I think, was due to cold rather than to anything else, for the thermometer was well below freezing point.

I remember that I was feeling it pretty badly, after my long spell in the tropics.

The lights moved steadily towards us, well over to our starboard. The tension increased. Surely our guns would speak soon ?

They did not, however, until the lights were well-nigh abeam on the starboard side, and then, suddenly, a single gun spoke from our own vessel, shaking the ship from stem to stern, and making most of us jump with the suddenness of it.

Instantly our other guns took up the note, and those of the other ships behind us followed suit, with a roar and a crash that seemed to split the very heavens above us.

Next moment, where the nebulous patches of red flare from the funnels of the enemy had shown, there came flash after flash splitting the darkness, and mingled with the roar of the enemy guns came the shriek and crash of flying and bursting shells.

Some of them whined overhead ; some burst in the sea near us, so that great columns of water were shot up into the air ; and some even splashed our decks. But no direct hit was scored.

We hammered away with our guns, firing steadily and regularly. The Germans returned the fire more rapidly, and also more wildly, so that although the air was full of the fiendish noise of flying shells, and our decks were sometimes deluged by the water thrown up when they exploded in the sea, still no direct hit was scored.

Suddenly the *Centaur* swerved violently, and we knew that we had only by a narrow squeak avoided a torpedo.

Next thing we knew, we had turned to starboard, and were steaming ahead at the very devil of a lick,



obviously with the intention of heading off the German flotilla to the north-eastward.

This looked like being warm work, and our excitement increased. Firing was still heavy, and we could see that our shells were doing some damage. A flare of throbbing yellow flame, blowing backwards like a plume in the wind, told us that one of the enemy's funnels had gone. . . .

Then, suddenly, this vanished, and so did the other fiery blobs that showed from the undamaged funnels. And the enemy gun-fire ceased. There came to our ears a loud crash, and a lot of shouting. Later we learned that the destroyer V.69, the German leader, had been hit by one of our shells, as a result of which her helm had jammed, so that as she came round in a half-circle another destroyer, the G.41, rammed her, and was so damaged herself that her speed was thereafter reduced to about seven knots.

When those lights vanished, I heard someone gasp :

"Christ ! They've sunk, poor devils !"

And then, from someone else with more experience :

"Don't be a bloody fool—they're trying to get away under a smoke screen !"

This, as it happened, was a fact. The enemy had thrown up a heavy smoke-screen, and behind this they did, in fact, manage to make good their escape.

As soon as our Commodore realized this he changed our course, and we headed for the Schouwen Bank in an endeavour to cut out the casualties, which he knew to be two badly damaged destroyers. There

was also a third, undamaged, but isolated from the rest in some way.

That pretty well finished the engagement so far as the *Centaur* was concerned, and I was amazed on glancing at my watch to find the time only three o'clock. The whole thing was over, so far as we were concerned, in a quarter of an hour or so. It is marvellous how quickly time can pass in such circumstances.

But so far as the other ships were concerned there was still something doing. Captain Lynes, in the *Penelope*, closing in from his original patrol station, sighted, about forty minutes later, a single enemy destroyer steaming slowly and apparently crippled.

Immediately the *Penelope*, the *Cleopatra*, and another cruiser turned their searchlights on her, and she was seen to be the V.69—the damaged flotilla leader.

The three cruisers immediately opened fire, and proceeded to pound the unfortunate craft with heavy shell-fire at very close range.

When they were quite certain that she was sinking, they switched off their searchlights, being anxious not to betray their position to other enemy craft.

There were those on board the *Cleopatra* who vowed that they heard the hissing of steam and the cries of the drowning as the V.69 sank beneath the waves—but in this they seem to have been optimistic, for it was afterwards ascertained that the German destroyer, though holed in a dozen places, with one funnel gone and half her stern shot away, most of her crew dead or dying, and her decks a shambles, did not sink, but actually managed to

limp to Ymuiden, where she arrived several hours later.

The other German straggler, G.41, with badly damaged bows, managed to reach the Dutch coast, and then doggedly continued to steam along it in the direction of Zeebrugge, which she presumably finally reached.

So far, so good—or bad, for the truth of it was that the German flotilla had managed, so far as the bulk was concerned, to slip through our intercepting forces.

The third German straggler, however, the S.50, was following her flotilla, and fell foul of one of our detachments, that led by the *Simoom*, T.B.D. under the command of Commander Inman.

A short, sharp action followed, the principal protagonists being the *Simoom* and the S.50. Firing was brisk, and the *Simoom* suffered rather badly, without being able to do very much damage to her opponent. The climax came when the latter managed to loose off a torpedo straight at the *Simoom*, which struck her full and fair.

Following the explosion from the torpedo came another, and much heavier one. The unfortunate *Simoom's* magazine exploded, and that finished her. What wasn't blown into the air sank almost immediately beneath the waves—and that was the end of the *Simoom* and her gallant crew.

The other units of the *Simoom's* detachment, the *Starfish*, *Surprise*, and *Milne*, acting in conjunction with the *Nimrod* and her destroyers, worked round the German destroyer's bows, and so drove her back to the Dutch coast.

Thus, to balance the loss of a gallant vessel and

her crew, we had succeeded in turning back three of the German boats, and more or less crippling two of them. The rest got through in safety.

It was very disappointing, but it was the fortune of war !

## CHAPTER XIX

H.M.S. 'CURAÇOA'

THERE were so many actions in that period—so much coming and going—so much chasing of U-boats and so much dodging 'em, that I have to confess my memory is a trifle vague and confused in regard to such matters as time and chronology. The action I have described in the last chapter stands out because, on that occasion, we failed. We did not always fail!

The next incident of which I have any clear recollection is of the old *Centaur* steaming back towards England after one of those many North Sea actions. It would be some time in the second dog-watch (i.e. between 6 and 8 p.m.) and we were no more than a few miles from Harwich. Everything was, as the Cockneys say: 'All Sir Garnet.' We were pleased with ourselves for recent good work done, and pleased at the notion of harbour and at least a few hours' real rest, without the thought of the lurking mine or sneaking submarine to worry us.

Suddenly there was a shock—a muffled explosion. The old *Centaur* seemed to rise and shake herself, then settle down again into the water. Men who were standing at the moment mostly went sprawling.

"Christ!" said someone, in an ordinarily conversational tone. "We've got it at last! That was a torpedo!"

"Torpedo me foot!" said another voice. "It was a perishing mine, that's what it was!"

And that *was* what it was. A floating mine had found us, and blown a pretty hole in our bottom, dead amidships.

A harsh barking of orders, and the tooting of the bo'sun's pipe. Every man to his allotted station—no hurry or flurry—no confusion.

A closing of water-tight bulkheads, and soon the sound of the pumps hard at work. Then, like a crippled hound-dog, we crept limping into Chatham.

And that, so far as I was concerned, was the end of the old *Centaur*. It was decided that she would have to be entirely refitted, and the whole ship's company was transferred bodily to the *Curaçoa*, a brand-new light cruiser which had just come down from the builder's yards.

And it wasn't long after this that we played our not unimportant part in the storming of Zeebrugge and the blocking of the harbour entrance by sinking 'block-ships.'

No need for me to tell the story of Zeebrugge—it has been told over and over again by far more able pens than mine.

We were on the scene early, and it was our business for some time to supervise the work of coastal motor boats, which were sent up the Elbe with depth charges to try to get the enemy submarines.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, a depth-charge consisted of a cylinder, rather like an oil-drum in appearance, which was filled with T.N.T., plus an attachment which caused it to explode under the

pressure of the water when it reached a certain depth.

The method of using them was as follows. The C.M.B. (coastal motor boat) would work in conjunction with an aeroplane, which, flying high, could detect the submarines below the surface of the water. As soon as one was thus spotted, the 'plane would signal the C.M.B., which would then drop its depth-charge, and immediately race from the danger-zone at top speed. A few moments later there would sound a muffled, but terrific detonation, and a great disturbance of the water—and if the depth-charge had been lucky, and done its work properly, there would presently be fragments of the wrecked sub. to be seen on the surface. A horrible death for the poor devils aboard the ill-fated craft.

My memories of Zeebrugge are a trifle scrappy—we were in almost continuous action for a long time, and in such circumstances one is apt to get a trifle vague and mixed, especially after the passing of twenty years.

Some things stand out with remarkable clarity though. I remember the blowing-up of the viaduct when we sent a specially prepared submarine at it and blew it sky-high. The sub. was one of the old 'A' class, and we stuffed her bows full of T.N.T. She had a special gyroscopic steering attachment, which was designed to keep her going on any course laid for her.

The skeleton crew responsible headed her straight for the viaduct, started her off at full speed, and then hastily abandoned her—a proceeding fraught with considerable danger to life and limb, I may mention.

The gyroscope kept her dead on her course, and she eventually crashed right into the viaduct, whereupon there followed a terrific explosion—and the viaduct was no more. All that was left of it was a gaping hole, which that very night was responsible for a tragedy (though I suppose we didn't regard it as such at the time) when a whole corps of German military cyclists, coming along in the pitch darkness and not knowing what had happened to the viaduct, rode plump into the hole! I do not know how many met a watery death on that occasion, but the casualty list must have run well into three figures.

I remember, too, being sent aboard the *Vindictive*, Sir Roger Keyes' flagship, to help rig up the flame-throwing jets, which were later to bathe the Zeebrugge mole in a terribly literal 'baptism of fire.'

The story of how, on the eve of the big battle—when it was known that it would commence on St. George's Day—Admiral Keyes flew the significant signal: '*St. George for England*,' has been told over and over again. But I have never yet seen any reference in print to the Fleet's spirited response to that signal, which read: '*And we'll give the dragon's tail a damn' good twist!*'

The officer in charge of the smoke-screen, under cover of which the main attack was to be made, was none other than Brock, of firework fame. He held the rank of lieutenant, and was in charge of smoke-screens, fireworks, and such stunts. But that smoke-screen was destined to be his last, poor chap, for during the action he was killed outright by a bullet.



And, finally, there was the incident of the sinking of the concrete block-ships. They crept up under cover of the smoke-screen (after two attempts had failed) and, mostly under fire, were duly sunk, completely blocking the mouth of the harbour.

The skeleton crews who took them up and manœuvred them into position, having sunk them, had orders to swim as far as possible, and then to float on their backs, being careful to keep the North Star in a dead line with their heads, until they were picked up. Not such a cheerful job, for, apart from anything else, the month was only April, and the water was vilely cold.

The majority of them were successfully picked up, but a number died, either from cold or drowning or both. Later I had a few words with one of the survivors, who remarked that he wouldn't go through it again for a doubled pension!

These are the incidents that stand out from my rather jumbled recollections of Zeebrugge.

It was in August 1918, if my memory serves me aright, that we of the Harwich force, under Rear-Admiral Tyrwhitt, were engaged in patrolling the entrances to the mine-fields, and sending coastal motor boats across the mines, towards the mouth of the Ems, to attack all the sweepers they could find.

On one such occasion—and it was a pretty fatal one, for the C.M.B. flotilla, unsupported from the air as the seaplanes could not take off from the water owing to a complete lack of any sort of wind or breeze at all, was attacked and nearly wiped out by enemy 'planes—the *Curaçoa* was cruising about near the rendezvous. Admiral Tyrwhitt at that

time had no notion that the flotilla was in any sort of danger, but, observing a Zeppelin hovering around, decided to endeavour to entice her out to sea, away from the flotilla.

She duly fell for it, and commenced to dog us, looking very wonderful with the morning sun shining on her silvery gas-bag. Presently a Lieutenant S. D. Culley, of the R.A.F., took off from a towed lighter in a small Camel aeroplane.

We all watched him excitedly as he zoomed up, until he presently disappeared into the clouds. But the Zeppelin remained below cloud-level, glistening in the sunshine with her envelope looking like a gigantic silver cigar suspended in the air. Apparently those on board had not noticed their insect-like attacker as he took the air.

But presently the nose of the Zepp. turned upwards, and, moving with the slow dignity befitting her mammoth size, she too penetrated the cloud-bank and disappeared.

It must have been about ten minutes later when we heard the faint sound of machine-gun fire, crackling high above our heads. A moment or so later came a great flash of flame, shining dully through the cloud. And almost immediately afterwards there came pelting down into the sea showers of splintered metal—fragments of aluminium that hissed as they struck the water, and other grimmer objects that had not long before been living, breathing men!

A hoarse cheer went up to acknowledge the remarkable feat of the tiny 'plane, and the gallantry of the man who had once again repeated the age-old story of David and Goliath.

Immediately after this Admiral Tyrwhitt hoisted the signal to the Squadron :

‘ *See Hymn 224.* ’

The moment there was an opportunity, all hands were eagerly searching their hymn-books, to discover the meaning of this cryptic signal. Hymn 224 was that very popular one : ‘ O Happy Band of Pilgrims,’ and we read :

‘ O happy band of pilgrims  
Look upward to the skies,  
Where such a light affliction  
Shall win so great a prize.’

Early in November rumours of an approaching Armistice got around, but few of us took them seriously—we had heard rumours before.

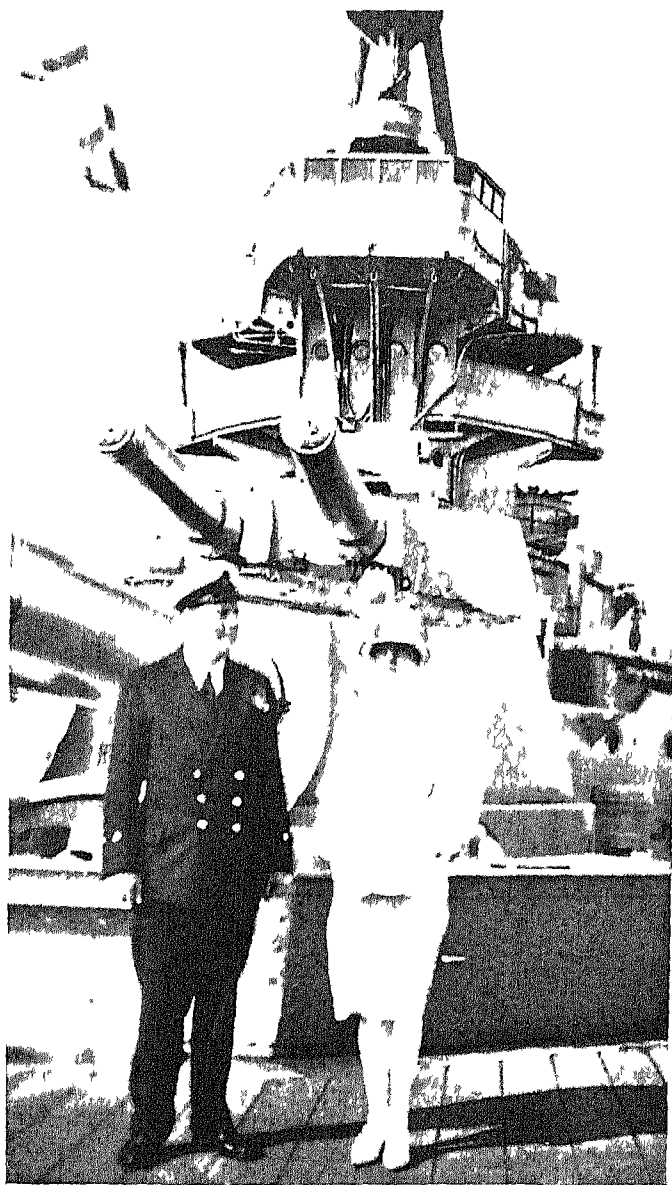
But on the morning of the 11th we were assured that the Armistice was a fact, and that it came into force at eleven o’clock, *ack emma*.

And, sure enough, seven bells had hardly sounded when there came the *boom-boom* of signal guns, both from the shore and the ships in harbour (we were in Harwich at the time), together with the frantic screaming of syrens from ships, locomotives, and factories, and, borne faintly on the off-shore breeze, the joyous clanging of church-bells.

Then the word was passed for all hands, and we duly assembled on the main-deck, still hardly daring to believe it.

The Admiral addressed us himself. I regret to say that I hardly remember all he said, but the gist of his speech was :

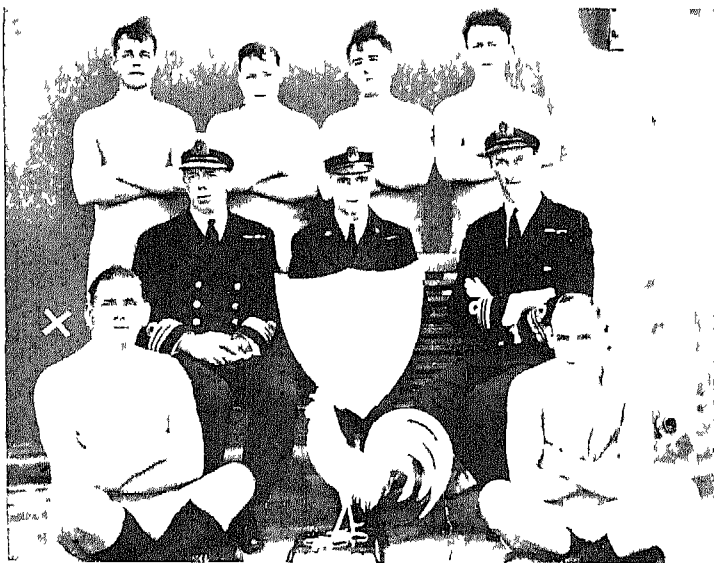
“ Well, my lads, an Armistice has been signed, and that means that, officially, the War is at last at



VISITORS' DAY ON THE MARLBOROUGH



MR BRUCE (x) WITH THE BAND OF THE *CURAÇOA* (1918)



THE CREW OF THE *MARLBOROUGH*'S GALLEY WHICH  
WON THE SILVER COCK (1929)

Author marked x (see Chap. XXIX)

an end ! But don't let yourselves imagine that for you—for *us*—it is by any means really finished yet. There will be plenty of work for the Navy to do for some time to come ! But in the meantime, enjoy yourselves. Heaven knows, you've earned it . . . ! ”

Immediately the order was given to 'Splice the main brace'—a double tot of rum for every man. Then shore boats came off, bringing the wives and sweethearts who were lucky enough to be on the spot. They were allowed on board, and oh, what an orgy of shouting, laughing, kissing, and crying there was !

Soon after that my recollection commences to become a little vague. Practically every soul aboard was allowed ashore, and off we went in droves, to find that everyone in Harwich seemed to have gone as mad as march hares.

It soon became a phantasmagoria of drinking, singing, playing all sorts of instruments, kissing every girl you saw, shaking hands with every man. Clapping each other on the shoulder—beer and whisky and rum running like fountains everywhere. . . .

I think my messmates and I went rolling along the streets, arm-in-arm, and catching everyone we met (except those wary ones who hastily took shelter in convenient doorways) like fish in a net, and carrying them with us, to the raucously bellowed strains of all the popular patriotic songs—and, for some unknown reason, that good old favourite : 'Daisy Bell.'

Possibly, my last recollection of that gloriously hectic day was of seeing a very drunken marine standing swaying precariously on the top of what

was apparently an abandoned taxi-cab, inside which about six of his comrades had passed out and were snoring stertorously. He was singing in a very beery voice to a large and enthusiastic audience :

“ Now this—blooming—War is over.  
O, how happy I can be . . . ! ”

## CHAPTER XX

### WHEN WAR IS OVER

**A**PRÈS la guerre . . . !  
How often those words—either in French or English, and in the latter case not undecorated by those unprintable additions so dear to both the Services—had been on our lips ! But when at last that so long talked of and desired epoch finally dawned, it seemed almost impossible to believe it.

But it was not long before it was impressed upon us in a very forcible manner.

After the War, the panoply of Peace ! And while there had been some devastatingly sad sights enough during the hostilities, some of the earlier results of the Armistice were, in their way, almost as sad.

Amongst sailors, when the first joyous frenzy of the Armistice was over, the burning question of the day was—what was to happen to the German Fleet ?

Officially, we knew less than nothing. But the wildest rumours flew around daily—almost hourly :

The German Navy had mutinied to a man, and had murdered most of their officers and seized the ships, which they proposed to hand over to the Allies. . . .

The Admiralty had agreed to Marshal Foch's demands that the whole of the German Fleet should be surrendered, and they would be sunk at sea. . . .

The Germans had refused to surrender their



Fleet, and they proposed to issue in force into the North Sea, there to fight their last fight and to die at their guns. . . .

And so on.

We now, of course, know more or less what actually did happen—that Marshal Foch did indeed demand the complete surrender of the German Fleet, and that the Naval Council agreed that this should be done. But the Allied Premiers, recognizing the importance of the point so vigorously urged by Mr. Lloyd George—that no risk should be taken of a breakdown in the Armistice arrangements—disagreed with Foch, and ignored the advice of the Naval Council. They decided that it was not advisable to demand the surrender of the Fleet, and that disarmament and internment would be sufficient.

In due course Admiral Wemyss announced to a meeting of the Allied Admirals in Paris that the fate of the German Fleet had been finally decided upon—the German capital ships, cruisers, and destroyers were to be interned at Scapa Flow, and the submarines at Harwich. It was then decided that Admiral Beatty should be appointed to enforce the clauses in the Armistice which had bearing upon the surrender and internment of the German ships.

But, of course, none of these matters was known to us at the time, and it was not until about the 15th or 16th of November that we on the *Curaçoa* knew that we were, so to speak, to be ‘in at the death.’

Actually, on the 17th we knew definitely that it was to be the business of the Harwich force to receive the surrendered German submarines.

For the rest of that day all was excitement and

activity throughout the ships of the force, for it was known that the actual surrender was to take place the following day.

However, as it happened there were delays, apparently due to the disorganization amongst the German ships and dockyards, where a mutiny, or something very much like it, was undoubtedly in progress.

We were standing by all day on the 18th, and at about two o'clock in the afternoon a message was received by Admiral Tyrwhitt that the first squadron of German submarines was just putting to sea from Wilhelmshaven. After that their progress was reported almost hourly, and around 3 p.m. on the 19th we at last got the order to put to sea, and steamed off to meet them.

It was a queer feeling, to be going off to meet these submarines, which we had been hunting or been hunted by for so long, in such circumstances. In the beginning we were all as happy as sandboys about it, but it wasn't long before our feelings about the matter changed very considerably.

A Cockney C.P.O., joining a group of us in the mess, exclaimed :

" Blimey, 'ave any of you piped ole Tyrwhitt's clock this morning ? "

We said we hadn't, and asked what was the matter with it ?

" Well, nuffink much, I s'pose," was the reply. " 'Cept that 'e don't look at all as though this was a perishin' victory—by the look on 'is clock you'd fink it was a blinkin' funeral we wos attendin' ! "

" Well, so it is, in a way ! " exclaimed another of us. " I expect the old chap's thinking how he'd be feeling if the boot was on the other foot, my lad ! "

That started us thinking, I fancy. After all, a sailor is a sailor, whatever his nationality may happen to be, and the most important thing about any good sailor is his love for his ship. It came to me then how I should be feeling if we were steaming out to surrender to the German Fleet (as, God knows, might well have been the case at one time) and to abandon our ship to enemy hands, and see our flag hauled down and replaced by that of Germany.

It gave us furiously to think, and it sobered us up very considerably, and this feeling was decidedly increased by the order of the Admiral which became known eventually—that, when passing the German submarines or at any other time in the proceedings, complete silence was to be observed on all ships, and no demonstration of any sort was to be allowed. Admiral Tyrwhitt, every inch a gentleman, would not allow anything that savoured at all of crowing over a beaten enemy.

We felt some surprise when we finally put to sea to meet our surrendering enemy—for the order was 'action stations,' and we went out as though to battle, every man at his post by the guns or elsewhere just as though we were going into action.

When we sighted the pathetic little fleet of twenty submarines, with their larger escort, orders were given that the guns should be trained on them, in case of any hostile attempt. Somehow, this seemed to me to make a rather painful situation even worse—it was like threatening an unarmed man, for we knew that all these once so dangerous vessels were under strict orders to be disarmed, and had no doubt but that the order had been complied with.

We stood at our stations, silent and glum—in a very different spirit from that in which we were

wont to go into action, when any moment might well be our last.

These German lads were sailors, like ourselves. And like us, they had only been doing their duty and fighting for their country. It seemed unfair, somehow, that they should, after fighting so long and so bravely, be put to this humiliation. Speaking for myself—but I think also for most of my messmates—all feeling of enmity and rancour had disappeared, and now we only felt sorry for what was before our defeated enemies. Had we been allowed to cheer, I think we should have done so in a spirit of pure sympathy, and as a tribute to the men whom the fate that controls the fortunes of battle had placed in such an unenviable position.

So there was nothing of the Roman holiday or triumph about the proceedings.

In dead silence, save only for the hoarse barking of the necessary orders by the officers responsible, we watched the little fleet of defeated submarines draw level. Then we formed up around them, and, still in the same deathly silence, escorted them to an anchorage near the South Cutter buoy.

The boats were smartly handled. The crews on them were smart, and spick and span in their best uniforms. But to us these U-boats looked like crippled or disabled men, for we knew that they were disarmed, and that their teeth (and such teeth, too!) had been drawn.

Just off the South Cutter they dropped anchor. There was a short and unpleasant pause, and then from our ships went the boats, carrying the British crews who would man the subs. on the last stage of their sad journey.

A short time after, down came the German ensign,

and up went the British. I don't know about the others, but so far as I was concerned the Admiral's kindly and chivalrous order was unnecessary—even at that moment, which for us should have been one of the greatest triumph, I felt more inclined to groan than to cheer. I am not at all ashamed to have felt like that.

As soon as the submarines were ready, they were taken along and made fast to a submarine 'trot' off Parkeston, and the German crews were immediately transferred to a German transport for return to their own country.

It was a sad, pathetic sight. The men were nearly all worn, thin, and haggard (apart from anything else they had not been getting fed as we had), and their faces were nearly all pale. They looked straight to their front, and their eyes seemed to have no expression in them at all.

But at last it was all over, and by ten o'clock the German transport was steaming away. And I, for one, heaved a sigh of relief as we made for our own moorings that the business was at last over.

But, alas, only for the moment! As a matter of fact it lasted for about a week, small batches of submarines coming along daily to give themselves up, while Admiral Beatty, in the *Queen Elizabeth*, did the same thing for the cruisers and battleships of the Grand Fleet in the Firth of Forth.

When our reception of the surrendered submarines was completed, there followed a period of very strenuous work for myself and other divers attached to the force.

We had to go down continuously—to lay new chains for the mooring of the submarines, and to

keep them in position ; to rig new moorings and inspect the existing ones.

Then, for some reason, two of the subs. sank at their moorings, and we were continually up and down after lost gear and what-not. No excitement, but plenty of hard work about it.

At length I got what I considered to be a very well-earned leave, and shortly after I returned I was rather surprised to hear that the Admiral wanted the names of all the men who were natives of Oxford, or who had lived there for any time.

Of course I duly handed my name in, but for some time I heard no more about it.

When I heard that Admiral Tyrwhitt was going to Oxford to get his D.C.L. degree I did not connect the two incidents, but almost immediately after his return he sent for me. His greeting surprised me, for he said :

“ Look here, Bruce, I've got to apologize to you ! ”

He then explained that the authorities at Oxford had wanted him to bring with him a gun-crew of Oxford men to take part in the celebrations—but as it was found that I was the only man hailing from the city, it had, of course, been impossible to comply. Still, I had the honour of having a drink with the Admiral, which more than made up for it !

Very much to the surprise of us all, hardly had the Admiral departed to Oxford, when we were under orders to put to sea again, and it transpired that we were to take the King and Queen and the Prince Royal of Denmark back to their own country.

I may say we were all very much impressed, and some of us a trifle awed by having such regal personages aboard, but we were pleasantly surprised to find the Royal Family so extremely charming and

simple. One might almost use the word 'homely' to describe them. The King used to chat most pleasantly with all and sundry, and was interested in everything.

They were very fond of music, and so the band, of which I was a prominent member, was kept continuously busy. But when we arrived at Christiana (now Oslo) it was too cold for us to play Their Majesties off the ship, as we had hoped to do. The cold was terrific—the water froze in the hose-pipes, and we dared not clean the decks down. Nevertheless, the King shook hands with me and wished me well before he left us.

On our return to England I took part in a ceremony which, in many ways, was almost as sad as the surrendering of the enemy ships.

Admiral Tyrwhitt was relinquishing his command, and leaving the *Curaçoa* for good.

This may not sound a very important matter to the casual reader, but to us, who had been with him for so long (for in those dark days a week was like a year!), who had faced so many perils with him, and who knew him for the splendid sailor and indomitable fighter that he was, it meant a lot.

I am not sure whether it would be right to say that we *loved* the Admiral—though, in a way, we certainly did. To say that we honoured and revered him would, I think, be more apt. I know that I have seen many a blow delivered by a man of the Harwich force when some stranger has made a derogatory remark about him. He inspired in the men who served under his command the same regard that Drake, Nelson, and the other great Lords of the Oceans inspired in their time, and to lose him at last was a sadness indeed.

And I believe he felt just as bad about leaving us as we did at losing him.

Anyway, since he was going, it was up to us to give him a great send-off, and I don't think the Harwich force had ever worked in such unity before as they did in this matter.

When at last the great, sad moment came, the boat that was waiting to row the Admiral to Shotley Pier was manned entirely by cruiser captains, each one pulling an oar like an ordinary sailor.

When the Admiral made his farewell speech it was heard in silence, but there was more coughing and blowing of noses than, I think, I have ever heard on any similar occasion. I saw one or two men blubbing shamelessly, like small boys when a beloved parent is going away for a long time.

The Admiral himself was by no means unaffected, and those near him said afterwards that when, at the conclusion of his farewell speech, he said good-bye to Blücher, our black cat, the mascot who had been captured by us from the Germans and who had been through so many actions with us, there were tears in his eyes.

When we could let it go, my word, how we cheered! I very much doubt whether any other leader during the whole of the War or after it got such an ovation.

The boat, rowed by its crew of captains, passed slowly down the middle of the double line of ships—cruisers, drifters, and submarines—and the crews, massed at the sides and in such rigging as there was available, cheered hard enough to burst their lungs in their farewell to this hero of the sea.

And so he left us to take up a higher command in the Navy he had served so well.



When he landed at Shotley Pier it was lined by boy recruits to the Navy, brought there specially that they might see in person the man who had so ravaged the Germans that they had put a price upon his head.

It is queer the effect one great personality can have upon a whole collection of other persons. I don't know how the others felt about it, but I do know that when the Admiral had gone I felt the queerest sense of loneliness. It was very much like the feeling one has when left in a house from which the presiding and dominating spirit has departed.

I know also that it was the first time that I felt really convinced that the War was actually over.

I have written of these two events at some length because I believe them both to be unique in their way. Sir Henry Newbolt has written of the first one that 'it had few parallels in history,' and I feel convinced that the second one falls into the same classification.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A LITTLE MORE WAR . . .

ON the departure of Admiral Tyrwhitt, Admiral Cowan took over, and very soon after that we were ordered to sea again—destination unknown.

Admiral Cowan was a strict disciplinarian, and was said to be particularly keen on matters of naval etiquette, and so on. He was also said to have more medals to his chest than any other man in the British Navy.

In due course we learned our destination—the Baltic! And immediately there was a good deal of grouching aboard—for going to the Baltic meant more war, and we all felt we had already had a bellyful of it. Also, the majority felt that Russia's troubles were her own, and that we had no call to interfere on either side.

However, orders are orders, and in due course we found ourselves off the grim fortress of Kronstadt, then in the hands of the Red Army.

For some time we carried on a sort of guerrilla war—attacking the forts at night-time, our object being to start fires wherever possible, and then, with the coming of daylight, steaming off out of range—which must have been a bitter annoyance to the garrisons we had been hammering all night.

During these day periods the local inhabitants used to swarm around the ship's side in boats. They

were in the most terrible condition, ragged and emaciated from lack of food. They were all semi-starved, and would do almost anything for a scrap of bread or any sort of broken food. We used to throw scraps over the side of the ship and the occupants of the boats would scramble and fight like animals for them. If a lump of bread fell into the sea some of the bolder spirits would leap over the side of the boat after it without the slightest hesitation. It was a very distressing sight to see human beings so degraded, almost to the level of animals, by lack of the barest necessities of life.

Another thing they were eager for was soap. They would trade anything they had for it, and I secured a really good violoncello for five bars of coarse yellow soap.

This went on for some weeks, and then on 13 May (some proof of the hoodoo which the number 13 is said to carry) we struck a floating mine at about eight o'clock in the morning.

The point of impact was aft, just under the officers' quarters, and the water came rushing in like a cataract.

Of course it was me for the doctor, and then into diving rig and down right away to inspect the damage. It was considerable. In addition to one large hole, there were a number of smaller ones. I and every other available diver worked like fiends to rig collision-mats and to plug the smaller holes, but we could not keep the water out of her.

Finally, in what amounted to almost sinking condition, we were towed, stern first, into Copenhagen to effect such repairs as we could.

During this strange trip I had an even stranger

experience. Several of the cabins were completely full of water, amongst them the one containing the ship's safe.

As it was necessary that this should be immediately accessible, I had to dive *inside the ship*—which was certainly a new experience for me.

It was something of a job, too, for the safe was so firmly secured that I had to work for hours with a cold chisel before I could get ropes around it and have it hoisted up out of the water.

At Copenhagen we had to do all our own repairs, and I was under water nearly all the time. We managed to patch the holes fairly efficiently, and pump the ship clear of water. But there was damage done to one of the propellers which definitely put it out of action, and which it was quite impossible to repair except in dry-dock and with the proper tools and machinery available.

Eventually we staggered back home at a very slow crawl, under our own steam and with only one propeller working. Luckily we did not strike any very bad weather, or I should not like to say what might have happened.

As it was we arrived quite safely at Sheerness, and the ship was paid off and sent into dry dock at Chatham to be put right again.

Rather to my surprise I was given a shore job—that is to say, I was attached to the Boys' Training Establishment at Shotley. This consisted of the old ship *Ganges*, used as a training ship, plus a large shore establishment, where the lads training for the Navy were taught seamanship, gunnery, wireless, etc., all that was necessary, in fact, to make good seamen of them—to say nothing of ordinary school-work, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and all sorts

of sports. There were something like a thousand lads being trained there during my time.

My work consisted of repairs to pier, boats, galleys, and so on. A monotonous sort of life, with nothing to it worth recording here. But I found it a pleasant rest after the hectic years of the War.

I cannot pretend that it was a hard time either. I worked pretty regular hours, with few emergency jobs (which are the nightmare and the curse of the diver's life at most times) and had plenty of shore-leave.

So I was able to get home to Oxford, and spent quite a bit of time with the old folk. They were now showing signs of ageing, and like most people, were mellowing with age. It may have been this, or it may have been due to the proof of the pudding being in the eating thereof, but the fact remains that they seemed to have quite got over their prejudices in regard to my choice of profession, and so I had some happy times with them.

The year or so I spent at Shotley was a restful interlude, but towards the end of it I began to get restless again, and so was not at all sorry when I found myself appointed to a ship once more.

## CHAPTER XXII

### H.M.S. 'ENDEAVOUR'

ONCE again I found myself faced with a new sort of job. The ship to which I was appointed was the *Endeavour*, the smallest craft I had yet served on, and one with a queer history.

She had originally been the private property of Mr. Solly Joel, who had, I believe, had her built as a private yacht. She had seen some gay doings and hectic parties in her time, I don't doubt! But latterly she had somehow fallen into Government hands, and had been converted into a survey-ship, which meant that she was controlled by the Hydrographic Department. It was her business to record depths, types of sea-bottom, and so on, for the purpose of keeping the Admiralty charts up to date. As may be imagined the diver's job on such a craft was both an important and a strenuous one.

I was very pleased with my new ship at first. Her smallness was a novelty, and her comely yacht-lines a pleasure to look at. I was a little less pleased with her when we put to sea, however.

I joined her at Sheerness, and in due course we went along to Falmouth. Here we learned that we were bound for Sierra Leone, on the west coast of Africa, via Gibraltar.

And in due course off we went. In the Bay we hit some of the dirtiest weather I have ever seen at sea, and did our smart little yacht give us a time, or just did she ?

My experience of dirty weather at sea had never been taken in anything smaller than a light cruiser, and I found this ex-yacht a very different proposition. Seas swept all over us—we were continually ‘ taking it green ’ as seamen say.

Apart from which the jolly little *Endeavour* fully justified her name by using her utmost endeavours to do everything a ship oughtn’t to do—with the sole exception of actually going to the bottom.

She plunged and rolled and pitched. She went on her beam ends, and then stood first on her stem and then on her stern. She danced and shied like a nervous colt in a thunderstorm.

Mind you, the weather really was stiff. We had to have life-lines rigged everywhere, and no one was allowed on the upper deck. Several of our boats were smashed to matchwood by the terrific seas, and the ship’s upper works and superstructure were pretty badly damaged.

Our commander was Captain Gary Hill, a real old sea-dog if ever there was one, and he remained on the bridge night and day right through the blow, until we actually reached Gib., by which time he was pretty well all in.

As for me, always having been a pretty good sailor, I had up to then been inclined to sneer at people who felt sea-sick, or who got the wind up when a vessel rolled a bit. But after that trip across the Bay in the *Endeavour*, I am inclined to feel more sympathetic with them. On the other hand, ever since then I have always felt a desire to hit anyone who

attempts to sing that fine old classic : ' In the Bay of Biscay O ! '

Anyway, pretty badly shaken, but still surviving, we reached Gibraltar at last, and I realized that being on an even keel was more like being in Paradise than I had ever previously imagined. All the same, I didn't feel too pleased with the prospect ahead. It seemed to me that I had somewhere heard rumours of typhoons and such like manifestations of nature in the neighbourhood of the West Coast . . . !

As soon as we got into Gib. I had to go down and inspect all the under-water fittings, which I did, and was able to report all well.

A few days later we left the Rock on the second stage of our voyage. We did not go through the Straits, but headed off along the coast of Morocco, *en route* for our destination.

It was not the first time I had been in the Atlantic, but I don't think I had ever realized before that the sea was quite so *big*, or the great rollers so menacing. That was the difference between seeing them from the deck of a cruiser, and from that of a mere yacht.

We hugged the coast all the way, passing inside the Canary Islands and rounding Cape Verde. Off Morocco, in the neighbourhood of Marrakesh, we were able to see, through glasses, a battalion of the famous French Foreign Legion on the march. They looked a pretty miserable lot—more like a gang of convicts than a regiment of soldiers, except for their long rifles.

We also saw a number of whalers at work, with the harpoon-guns perched in the bows of their boats.

We called at the Canary Islands for a few hours to collect mails and food—no one allowed on shore, which caused a bit of grumbling. After that we did



not stop again until we arrived at Freetown, where we were to begin our real work.

We had to survey the harbour, by way of commencement, and we got down to it without delay. Soon after daybreak on our first morning the boats were piped away. They carried working parties, with rations, whose job it was to climb the hills and cut down trees in order to make shore beacons. Other parties had to lay sea-beacons, the object of which was to make objectives upon which the theodolites of the surveyors could be trained.

All this created a good deal of sensation amongst the natives, mostly Kroom boys, who decided, in their queer coast-English, that we 'lib for make heap big ju-ju, one time.' In other words, that we were working some magic.

And when they saw me make my first descent into the depths of the ocean, they were quite convinced of this. Naturally, the effect of superhuman size produced by the diving costume, and the shining copper helmet, with its windows and vague sight of a face inside, impressed them enormously. And the air-tubes and the turning of the air-pump greatly increased their awe—for they saw in it more 'heap big god-god palaver.'

They crowded round in their canoes and surf-boats as closely as they dared, and the sensation when I came to the surface for the first time and swung my leg over the side of the boat was terrific. When I became aware of it I felt like a film star 'on location,' as I believe they call it.

But apparently I was too modest in my feelings. For the first time I went ashore, after I had been down once or twice, I discovered that I was treated with the queerest kind of reverence and the greatest

awe by the native population. Some of them seemed inclined to run away from me—some actually did. Others gazed, gaping at me from any comparative safety they could find. One or two tentatively offered me presents—mostly of shark's teeth, or something else of a fishy nature.

At first I was much puzzled by this behaviour, since they did not treat any of my messmates in a similar manner, but eventually I discovered that they had recognized me as the man who went down under the sea, and that they had decided that I was a sort of God of the Ocean bed—a kind of first cousin to Neptune, as I gathered. They seemed to think that if any one got the wrong side of me, I was just as likely as not to turn him into a fish, or to drown him on dry land, or some such dirty trick!

So you will observe how modest I had been merely fancying myself a film star, when I was actually regarded as a god!

I should have thought that the natives would have been a trifle more sophisticated than this, but I was told that the population was constantly changing, and that none of this bunch had, apparently, ever seen a diver at work before. Of course I got my leg pulled pretty badly about it in the mess, and for some time rejoiced in the nicknames of Great God 'Bud,' and 'Mumbo-Jumbo.' I also received a number of sacrifices and offerings from my messmates—not always of the sweetest or most hygienic nature.

There was tons of work for me to do. Apart from such work as I had to do for the surveyors—reporting on the nature and state of the sea-bottom, and so on, there was a good deal of ordinary harbour work to be done, with buoys, moorings, and so on.

It wasn't the safest sort of diving either, for the place was literally infested with huge, man-eating sharks, who would as soon think of going for you as looking at you, so that one seldom felt comfortable when under water.

On several occasions I was attacked by sharks, but I have already described one of my best shark-fights (the occasion on which I lost my boot) and one such encounter is very much like another, though the danger one is in keeps them from getting actually monotonous at the time.

One rather outstanding battle, though, was with *two* sharks. I believe them to have been male and female, or, possibly, old chums. Be that as it may, they made a concerted attack upon me, and for a minute or two I didn't like the look of things at all.

To dodge or fend off one shark with one's knife is quite enough, but when it comes to two of them attacking at once and from different angles it is apt to be rather too hot to be really funny.

Luckily, in this instance, I had a brain-wave, otherwise this story might never have been written. I happened to notice, close against one of my feet, an old, water-logged sack, caught around a sharp piece of rock. With a mighty effort I managed to tear it clear, and with this waving like a flag in my left hand, and my knife in my right, I offered the two denizens of the deep battle.

The shark, as I suppose is generally known, is, despite his savage nature, extremely nervous of anything in the nature of a phenomenon—and this waving sack at the bottom of the sea was regarded by these two fellows as something in that line.

Anyway, after flirting around for a few minutes, they both turned tail and went rapidly off, leaving

me in possession of the field, as it were. I was most unfeignedly glad to see the backs of them, I can assure you.

On another occasion I was bending down, trying to clear a length of cable that had got fouled round some rocks, when I felt a decided bump against that portion of my anatomy which was, at the moment, most prominent.

I turned to see what it was, and to my horror found myself face to face with one of the biggest and most wicked-looking sharks I ever saw in that neighbourhood. Luckily my movement frightened him, and he also went off without further argument.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### GREAT SNAKES . . . !

ON shore-leave I used to go about a good deal with a fellow named McKie, a genial Scot who was one of the surveyors. He, like myself, had something of a love for poking around amongst the natives, and generally exploring.

On one occasion, not far from Sierra Leone, we came upon a sort of small valley in which there were more snakes than I ever imagined could be alive in one continent at the same time. They were from two to three feet long, and black in colour, and they infested the little valley in a writhing mass, so that one couldn't have trod a yard without stepping on one or two of them. It was a horrible but in some queer way a fascinating sight to see that writhing, twisting mass of snakes.

"Looks like—which was it?—the Fourth Plague of Egypt? Anyway, the plague of serpents!" I remarked.

"Mebbe, mon," responded Mac. "But, losh, it looks more to me like a nasty attack o' deleer-r-r-ium tr-r-r-remens!"

That gave me an idea.

"Tell you what, Mac—we'll have to catch some of these, somehow!"

"That shouldna be deefecult. But how can ye be certain they're no poisonous?"

I hadn't thought of that, so decided to make some

inquiries. But not one of the natives we tackled would say a word about those snakes. All they would do was to shake their heads, look stupid, and repeat :

“ Me no savvy, boss—me no savvy ! ”

“ Tell ye what it is, mon,” Mac told me. “ Yon uncanny beasties are taboo, or ju-ju, or whatever these misguided heathens call it. Anyway, they’re sacred to ’em, in some way. Seems I’ve heard somewhere that some snakes are worshipped by the black devils. Anyway, ’twill be safest to leave yon fellows be, I’m thinkin’ ! ”

But I wouldn’t stand for that. I had a plan in mind, and I was not prepared to relinquish it. I had to get a bit of my own back for the ragging I had had over the matter of the natives regarding me as a god, and I thought I saw a way of getting it.

“ Well,” I said, “ I really wanted ’em alive, but if I can’t get em that way, I’ll have to have ’em dead, that’s all ! ”

Mac shook his head.

“ ’Twill no be safe ! ” he warned me. “ If these wee black laddies regard the beasties as sacred, maybe you’ll find yourself in trouble over it.

“ Don’t you believe it ! ” I laughed. “ There can’t be any trouble for me where the natives are concerned. Hang it, aren’t I a god myself ? ”

“ Ah, weel,” breathed Mac, resignedly. “ Best hae it your ain way, I suppose ! ”

Eventually I made an ingenious snake-trap, and we caught and killed a dozen or so without any danger to ourselves, or very much visible damage to the snakes. I then stiffened the bodies up by running a length of wire down the gullet of each, so that I could bend them into natural and life-like positions.

The three men who had been the ringleaders in chaffing me over the nigger business were given to having a glass or two over the eight most nights, and usually slung their hammocks in a pretty warmed-up condition.

On this particular occasion when they came along all the rest of the hammocks were slung, but no one was settled down to sleep. And over the place where the hammock of each of the trio should be slung there hung, suspended in mid-air, a bunch of serpents.

They were suspended by fishing-gut, quite invisible from any distance, and this having been carefully twisted, the serpents were slowly revolving in a manner which, combined with the wires I had put into them, gave them a singularly alive appearance.

Of course the three stared at the apparent phenomenon of snakes floating about in mid-air. Then they gasped :

"Here! What's all this! What are all those things? How did they get here? Take 'em away, for heaven's sake!" and so on.

Of course we all assured them most solemnly that there was nothing there at all, and I said, very solicitously :

"Well, you know, I've warned you fellows that it isn't safe to drink like you do, in the tropics. Remember, I've been here before. However, I've got something that will put you right, my lads. Come and have a basinful of this!"

I took them away and gave them a liberal dose of a mixture I had specially prepared, of which, if I remember rightly, the principal ingredients were old onion water and kerosene oil.

They were looking pretty shaken, and each took his dose like a lamb, and each was promptly very sick.

“ Now you’ll be better ! ” I told them.

And, sure enough, they didn’t see any more snakes—for the simple reason that the other chaps had quietly removed them while I was administering the dose.

They turned in very quietly, and for some days were the soberest men aboard.

But the language they used when they finally heard what I had done to them . . . !



## CHAPTER XXIV

### SUNSTROKE, SHARKS, AND CHRISTMAS

WE were considerably delayed in our surveying work by tornadoes, which blew our beacons to pieces, so that they had to be laid over and over again. However, the job had to be done, so we made the best of it.

I found that in the course of my diving operations, sharks were not the only things to be feared.

On one occasion I found that my diving-suit was leaking, and that the water was already up above my waist. So I sent up the signal to be hauled up, and this was done rather rapidly, which may have accounted partly for what happened.

I sat in the boat and the attendant removed my helmet and corselet, and as I sat there I bent my head forward to look for the defective spot in my dress through which the water had penetrated. In doing this I got into such a position that the sun struck full on the back of my neck. I was conscious of no pain or discomfort, but almost immediately something seemed to happen to my eyes. Things went black—then came whirling circles of light, increasing in brightness until they seemed to flame. And then . . . just nothing!

I woke up in the sick-bay, with a head that felt like nothing on earth, to be informed that I had got 'a touch of the sun.'

The job I had been on was an important one, and I worried about it, lying there. So as soon as the doctor came along, I announced that I felt fine, and wanted to get back to work again. He was very reluctant, but I insisted, and at last he allowed me to get up to 'see how I felt.'

The answer to that really was that I felt awful. My head was swimming as well as aching, and the decks seemed to whirl around as I stood on them. But I didn't say a word about it—I assured the whole world that I felt just fine.

And in due course down I went, and had not been below long when I felt a lot better—and by the time I came up again I was perfectly normal, except for a slight headache. I have wondered since whether that recovery was a little legacy from my parents' faith-healing beliefs, or whether going down below the surface in a diving dress is really a good cure for sunstroke.

McKie and I, in our rambles ashore, got out to a place called Kissy, about three miles from Freetown, where they had great oil-tanks for supplying the Elder-Dempster boats.

It was all rather interesting, and we remained there, nosing about, until well after dark, when we set out to walk back.

As we strolled along the narrow path, chatting, Mac suddenly put a warning hand on my arm, checking my progress.

"Bide a wee!" said he, in a sharp whisper. "What's yon . . . ?"

He pointed ahead, as he spoke, with his stick. Peering through the darkness I could just see some hunched-up, dark body on the path ahead. It looked as though it might be some crouching animal,

ready for a spring. And, except for Mac's stick, we were quite unarmed.

"Goodness knows!" I responded, after a brief examination of the mysterious body. "But I don't like the look of it!"

We stood silent and tense, staring at it. It did not move. After a moment, Mac made a hissing noise at it. No response. He stamped his foot and shook his stick. Still it did not move.

Emboldened by its immobility, we moved up closer, and then saw that it was a Kroo boy who had curled himself up right on the pathway and, presumably, gone to sleep.

Mac gave him an indignant prod with his stick.

"Hey, you . . .!"

No sign of life from the recumbent figure.

"Hey! Wi' ye come awa' oot of it?" This shouted, and accompanied by an even harder prod from the point of the stick. But still not the slightest response.

"Mon, I'm thinkin' he'll be deid!" announced Mac, in an awed tone.

"Just a minute!" said I.

I leaned forward, nearer to the figure. And now I could detect a slight regular movement, and the sound of breathing coming from the prostrate nigger.

"He may be dead, but if he is he's breathing darned well!" I commented. "Here, give me that stick!"

The nigger was sort of half-kneeling, half-crouching, in a position admirably adapted to what I had in mind. I shouted:

"Come on, you fella! You lib for get up and talkee-talkee . . .!"

And at the same time I brought the stick down across him with a couple of resounding *thwacks*.

A sudden convulsion shook him, and in a moment he was on his feet, shivering and gibbering.

"No, no boss—me no dead!"

"So I can see!" I returned, grimly. "What you lib for make here, eh?"

In reply to which he drew himself up proudly, and announced:

"Me watchman, sah!"

"Are you though!" said I, laughing. "Well, you look like getting promotion soon, if that's the way you keep watch!"

As we went on, Mac suggested:

"Mebbee the puir wee laddie was ill."

"Maybe he was drunk—that's more like it!" I told him.

And, as it happened, I was right, for we found out later that the natives would steal the oil at every opportunity, and drink it by the pint, getting happily 'tight' on it. They would even drink it out of the lamps, if they could not get it any other way!

I think it was a few days after this that I had to do a diving job close inshore, in the far corner of Freetown harbour.

It wasn't deep, and I went down pretty quickly. But as soon as I got to the bottom I wished I had been less precipitate—in fact I very heartily wished I had not come down at all!

For the place was like a diver's nightmare.

Almost as that valley had been full of snakes, so was the water there full of sharks. I have never seen—or even dreamed of—so many sharks all together before in my life. In fact, I should hardly have thought there were so many sharks in the sea.

It wasn't a mere school of them—it was a multitude. Sharks of all shapes and sizes—the water was just a seething mass of them. I was in the middle of the gathering, and, if they turned on me, liable to last about thirty seconds—if I was lucky.

You may bet your life I didn't stay there. I didn't even signal to be hauled up! I just plugged my finger in my outlet valve, signalled 'more air' and shot to the top like a bullet from a gun.

I reported that it was quite impossible to go down because there were millions of sharks there. My officer seemed a bit doubtful when I described the scene to him, and asked when I had been ashore last. I assured him that I was not suffering from delirium tremens, and said that I would willingly go down again if he cared to come with me. At that moment I happened to glance over the side of the boat, and then said quickly :

"If you doubt me, just have a look down there, sir!"

He did so, and saw that, a few yards below the surface, the water was literally black with the brutes. They had evidently followed me up to see what had happened to such a toothsome morsel.

Upon inquiry we soon solved the mystery of this phenomenon. Right against this spot were the slaughter-houses, where the cattle were killed as they came off the boats. All the entrails and other offal was dumped in the sea right here, and it had, of course, attracted pretty well all the sharks in the world to the spot.

It was a sort of El Dorado of food for them, and it is perhaps as well for me that this was so. For had they not been pretty well sated with food, I

doubt very much if I should have got out of the mob alive.

Another rather nasty experience I had about this time was when I went down to inspect a fouled anchor. Having completed my inspection, I signalled to be hauled up—*slowly*. Somehow the fools up above misinterpreted the signal, and hauled me up very suddenly and very rapidly. As a result I got neatly nipped in the fouled cables, and it was about a half-hour before I could extricate myself, and was in serious danger of being crushed at any time. Had the vessel above me swung at her moorings to any extent it would certainly have been all up with me.

We spent a lively Christmas at Sierra Leone that year. H.M.S. *Dwarf*, the gunboat of the station, joined us for the festivities, and we moored the two ships together, stem to stern, for the day.

In the morning we played football—Dwarfs v. Endeavours—on a field composed of burning-hot red sand. Surely about the most strenuous game of football I have ever played.

In the afternoon we had the usual Christmas ceremonies (which I have described elsewhere in this book) and in the evening all was set for a grand concert.

We went all out on this, and rigged a most elaborate stage, complete with tabs, backcloth, and curtain, on deck.

The first two turns went fine. Then came my turn to give a cornet solo. I got up on the stage, acknowledged the loud applause with which I was greeted, and then started to blow my cornet with great gusto.

But the cornet wasn't the only thing blown during

that act, by any means. Old Boreas thought he'd have a go, too, not to be outdone in blowing by a mere mortal. Down on us came one of those sudden tornadoes, and I had to jump for my life as stage, backcloth, tabs, and all were lifted bodily from the deck and blown to goodness knows where by the force of the wind.

It might have been a lot worse, for no one was hurt, but it put the final kybosh on our Christmas festivities. However, it's all in the day's sailing, and we, as usual, made the best of it.

## CHAPTER XXV

### MY PARENTS PASS ON

IT was about this time that my life was saddened by the news of my mother's death. I should dearly liked to have been with her at the last, or at least to have seen her again, but it was not to be. My great consolation in this matter has been that we parted on the best of terms.

News of her serious illness reached me by wireless, and Captain Hill very kindly allowed me to send a message back. Soon afterwards I heard of her death.

It was a wonderful passing. Although I was not there myself I have since interviewed several people who were, and have the story so vividly that it is almost as though I had been there in person at the time.

One often hears the phrase 'a glorious death'—generally used in regard to someone who has died an heroic death in battle, or elsewhere. Such a death certainly has its glory, but I do think the term is most applicable to a case such as my mother's, for she died absolutely unafraid—even happy—and in the full glory of the great faith which had so well sustained her all her life. All that she had faith in may have been a chimera—or it may not—but the fact remains that the faith itself was a very *real* thing, not only to her, but to others through her.



I have often thought that if only the majority of people had such wonderful faith, the world would be a very much better and happier place.

My mother had never been strong. Most of her life she had suffered from ill-health, and soon after the birth of my brother she had consented to undergo a major internal operation. Afterwards she had always said she had sinned in allowing this to be performed.

"If I had only had faith in the Lord," she would say, "He would have made me well!"

Sometimes she was too weak and ill to do her work. At such times she would offer up a short prayer for strength, and, sure enough, in a little while she would be accomplishing her tasks with apparent ease.

I have known her to get up in the middle of the night to do the household washing, and when asked the reason for such apparently eccentric behaviour she would explain that she had not felt strong enough to do it in the daytime, but after praying to God in the quietness of her bed, the strength had been vouchsafed her.

I have known her, when her eyesight was failing her, endeavour to read something aloud, and hesitate over it, peering closely at the printed page. Then she would suddenly close her eyes, and exclaim :

"O Lord, in Thy goodness and mercy, give me the power of sight!"

And immediately afterwards she would go on reading without hesitation or difficulty, holding the print at a normal distance from her eyes.

When the end came it was her heart that failed her. It had always been weak, and the time came

when it could no longer do its work. A chill precipitated the end, and although it did not seem to be serious at the time, my mother knew that the end had come. She decided that the Lord had willed that she should pass on, and she made no effort to fight against it.

To her grieving husband she spoke gentle words of comfort.

"It will not be for long, Walter. You will soon be joining me, and you will find me waiting for you on the Shining Shore . . . !"

And she died, so they told me afterwards, with the light of joy in her eyes, and a glad smile on her lips, softly singing a hymn in praise of the Lord she had served so long and so very faithfully.

I do not think my father was ever the same man again after her death, but he bore his loss bravely. He still cycled to his work every morning, and spent all his spare time at open-air and 'cottage' meetings.

But he lasted little more than two years after her death. He contracted a bad chill, but recovered from it—or seemed to do so—and carried on.

It seems, however, that he got out of bed too soon. This, I think, was because he was particularly anxious to attend some special celebrations of a religious body known as the Bristol Brothers, whose pastor, a Mr. Redwood, was a great friend of his. He duly attended, and marched through the cold streets alongside another great friend of his named Godfrey, bearing a banner.

But standing about at the open-air meetings he contracted another chill, and had to go back to his bed, from which he never rose again.

By this time I was fortunately home again, and was able to be present during his last moments.

As in the case of my mother, they were wonderful. He had no fear of dying—indeed, I think that he was glad to go. He had found life lonesome without my mother, I am sure, though he never complained.

At the end he had been very quiet and weak for some time. Then, suddenly, he raised himself in bed, and I saw that his eyes were shining as though with great joy and expectation. I could see, too, that he wasn't looking at anything within the room, but at something far beyond.

And then, in a firm, strong voice, he exclaimed :

“ Mary ! I am coming—over the water ! Oh, how it is shining—and on the other side I can see you, with your hand outstretched to greet me . . . ! ”

And so the end—as we know it—came.

I think that both my parents died what may be truly called ‘ a glorious death.’ Perhaps it was a reward for the sort of lives they led.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ARMADILLO ALARUMS

**A**BOARD the *Endeavour* we had a mania for pets. There was hardly anyone aboard who hadn't a pet of some kind, so that what with monkeys, parrots, snakes, and what-not, the place was more like a menagerie than one of His Majesty's ships.

Soon after Christmas I was loaned as diver to the *Dwarf*, and off we went to Anchor Bay, where a lot of old moorings left from the War had to be disposed of. These consisted on the surface of a number of buoys, and below as fine a tangle of rusted chain-cable as one could imagine. I was working for weeks down below on the cables. They were so fouled that it was quite impossible to disentangle them, so I just had to saw them into lengths with a hack-saw, and send up such sections as seemed to be worth saving, leaving the rest to rust and rot at the bottom.

This occupied weeks of hard work, and when that was finished the buoys had to be dealt with. It was decided to sink them, and so I got to work boring holes in them. I then used to get three or four men to stand on them, so that their combined weight brought the holes below the water-line, whereupon the buoys would, of course, slowly fill and sink to the bottom.

When, at last, it was all over, and I was returned

to the *Endeavour* once more, I found that the 'pet nuisance' had grown worse than ever. You could hardly walk anywhere without treading on a snake or kicking a mongoose or something of that kind, and whenever you sat down a monkey would come and squat on your shoulder, or some kind of exotic bird endeavour to nest in your hair.

But the star turn of all was a new pet recently acquired by the ship's butcher, and of which he was inordinately proud. This was a creature called an armadillo.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, who are not familiar with the appearance and habits of this jolly little drawing-room pet, the armadillo is an insect-eating animal, equipped with enormous claws, and entirely covered by a thick, bony plate-armour, which no ordinary instrument or weapon will pierce.

They are of varying species and sizes. The one owned by our butcher was, I believe, of the kind known as the Great Armadillo—a formidable, almost terrifying looking creature, measuring about three feet from head to tail. Its head was a cross, in appearance, between that of a duck and a crocodile, the long snout being, like the rest of it, entirely armour-plated, with two wicked-looking little black eyes peering out from the protection thereof.

But the mouth was not what one had to be afraid of. It had a remarkably long and active tail, also armoured, which I should imagine would break a man's leg without any trouble at all, and a quadruple set of the wickedest claws imaginable. They must have been over two inches long, as sharp as needles, and as strong as steel hooks.

When I first saw it it was living in a wooden cage which 'Chips,' the carpenter, had constructed for it,

but at the moment its proud owner was exercising it on deck, controlling its movements (more or less) with the aid of a boat-hook.

When I saw this extraordinary and decidedly sinister-looking brute sliding over the deck towards me I stopped short, stared, coughed, and then said a trifle timidly :

"Here, what's that ? Or am I seeing things !"

Before anyone could answer me, the extraordinary looking brute sat up on its hind legs and tail like a kangaroo. Then it opened its mouth, or bill, and from it there flicked what looked like a yard of ribbon. A buzzing insect, about two feet away from the creature, vanished suddenly. The tongue flicked back into the bill-like mouth, and the animal gave what seemed to be a satisfied smile.

The butcher nodded at me, with a proud smile.

"He eats insects, like billy-o !" he announced.

"So I observe !" I replied, without enthusiasm. And added, a trifle nervously : "Does he eat anything else ? Sailors, for instance ?"

"Not 'arf," interpolated a jocund bystander. "You'll have to sleep in your diving-helmet in future, Bruce, or he'll bite your blurry head off in the night !"

"Don't you talk such darned nonsense !" snapped the butcher, angrily. "Why, he's as gentle as a lamb, he is !"

"Is he ?" I asked. "Well, he dosen't look it, and he certainly isn't half as pretty !"

"He's more afraid of you than you are of him." said the butcher.

"Is he ? Then you'd better see to him—'cos he's liable to have heart failure at any minute."

"Of course he is. Look at this . . . !"

The butcher gave his pet a vicious prod with the business end of the boat-hook that would have impaled any ordinary animal. But in this case it only blunted the end of the boat-hook, and the armadillo promptly curled up into a perfect and impregnably armoured sphere.

"That's the stuff!" exclaimed a nearby seaman. "Who's for a game of football? On the ball, Orient . . .!"

With that he ran forward and administered to the 'ball' a tremendous kick. The armadillo did not move, but the seaman, who was wearing canvas shoes, let out a howl of anguish and hopped madly around the deck on one foot. He had afterwards to be taken to the sick bay and treated for dislocated toes.

"That'll teach you!" remarked the butcher, with complacent scorn. "Gentle as a lamb he is, I tell you."

After a period of patient waiting—for there was no means of hurrying the animal—the armadillo unrolled himself and proceeded on his lazy way. He caught a couple more insects, by the swift use of that singularly obscene-looking tongue of his. Then, with startling suddenness, he shot across the deck at about 60 m.p.h., and started to climb the wireless-mast with incredible speed.

With a wild shout of anguish the butcher leapt in pursuit, and by stretching his arms above his head, just managed to grip the armadillo's tail.

"Come down, you brute!" he hooted.

There was a moment of strained silence. The butcher hauled with all his might on the tail. The owner of the tail held fast. Nothing happened.

Then, very slowly, the tautness of the butcher's

muscular arms increased. He seemed, to us interested observers, to be reaching higher for some reason. He stood on tip-toe. And then . . . !

He was no longer on tip-toe. His toes no longer touched the deck. The armadillo was very slowly, but quite surely rising higher. . . . Instead of the butcher pulling his pet *down*, the pet was pulling the butcher *up* . . . !

By the time the howl of delight from us interested spectators had died down the butcher was some six inches off the deck, and yelling for help !

Another man, as well as he could for laughter, tailed on, and the armadillo's upward progress ceased. But it took three of them to get him down to the deck again—when he promptly rolled up in a ball and went sulky.

During the night I awoke with a vague sort of feeling that something was not quite as it should be. Lying and listening, as one does at such times, I became conscious of movement in the vicinity. I heard a scrabbling sound, and then a sharp click. The scrabbling sound started again.

I peered cautiously over the edge of my hammock . . . and there was that long, sinister, armour-plated form, sneaking over the deck. Suddenly he sat up, and in the moonlight I saw that yard-long, uncanny strip of a tongue flick. The clicking sound—it was the closing of his jaws—followed.

The armadillo went on, and commenced to climb, like a fly, up the wall. . . .

I went and found the butcher, and did not forget to tell him just what I thought about him and his armadillo. He said :

“What are you grumbling about, man ? The poor little thing won't hurt you ! ”



"I daresay not! I suppose you'd like me to take it to bed and cuddle it? Well, there's nothing doing—and what's more I'm not sleeping while the beastly thing's at large. So you'd better come along and box him up, or there'll be trouble!"

We found that the animal had simply pushed its way through the stout bars of its cage as though they had been cardboard. We secured it as best we could for the time being, and then I turned in once more.

But in the morning the armadillo was found nesting in one of the boats, and, what was worse, three pet snakes were missing—one of them belonging to an officer. We learned that armadillos are dead nuts on snakes. It seems that they just sit on them, and then slowly and methodically grind the life out of them by rubbing their armoured bodies up and down the length of the unfortunate snake.

Of course, there was a row about the officer's snake, and a sort of court-martial was held on the armadillo. And the ultimate outcome was that the word was passed for 'Bruce the Blacksmith.'

The result of this was certainly as curious a job as I have ever undertaken.

It was nothing less than to drill a hole through the armadillo's armour-plated back, in such a way of course as not to touch the flesh or hurt the animal at all. A devil and all of a job it was to get through it, too—but I accomplished it at last. I then made fast a shackle and swivel, and to this a stout chain was attached, the other end being secured to a staple in the deck near the brute's wrecked cage.

We then thought that we had His Nibs under control. But we were optimistic. In the middle of the night there sounded a sudden crash, followed

by the rattling and clanking of a chain—and believe me that confounded armadillo had simply torn the staple right out, and was clear of his moorings !

But that was his last adventure. Sentence of death was passed on him the following day, and he was painlessly despatched by means of a whiff of gas, which was able to penetrate even the defence of his patent ball-formation. And that was the end of him.

The butcher, however, grieved for his pet. He had the remains stuffed and mounted, and eventually took them home with him. His one regret was that the local taxidermist could not mount the creature with its tongue extended. As he said to me :

“ ‘There’s something in sticking your tongue out at someone if you’ve got one like that, isn’t there ? ’ ”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### HOME ONCE MORE

**D**URING our stay there the Bishop of Sierra Leone, a very fine man, was unlucky enough to contract blackwater fever, and died. When it came to his funeral, which was a very grand affair, the only organist in the place was not available, and, as it was known that I could play the organ, the duty was allotted to me.

Another occasion on which I was able to use my musical talents to some advantage was while we were lying off the Banana Islands. One of these was a sort of hospital or segregation island for diseased natives. There were hundreds of the poor devils on it, and we used to hear them sometimes singing hymns, unaccompanied, in such sad and mournful voices that it was quite moving to listen to them.

On one occasion I visited the island when they had one of these meetings or gatherings on. I found they had a small American organ, but the only man who could play it was dead.

So once more I volunteered my services, and the effect was really wonderful. As soon as the strains of the organ were heard more natives came creeping and limping in from the other parts of the island. Some of them were so ravaged by disease that they could only crawl.

But they swarmed in, and soon the gathering was

about six times its original size, so that the beach was literally packed with the poor devils, and they bellowed the old hymns with an amazing lustiness under the stimulus of the music. Much of the sadness, too, went out of their singing.

I thought to myself: 'If my parents could only see me now, how proud and pleased they would be!'

The Banana Islands were permeated by a singularly offensive smell of somewhat mysterious origin. I had to do some rather difficult diving there in order to recover a lost anchor, and in the course of my exploration of the ocean bed I once more suddenly came upon what appeared to be a school of sharks. I then discovered that they were in a sort of trap made of wire-netting.

Later investigations revealed the fact that these traps were set by the natives. When the tide was full the sharks swam gaily into the trap, and when it went down the natives used to capture them, kill them, remove the much-prized teeth and a few more edible portions of the carcasses, and then leave the rest to rot on the beach. Hence the smell, which was so strong that when the wind was in the right direction it could be detected at a distance of about eight to ten miles away!

On the whole I regard my stay in African waters as an enjoyable one, but, like all things, it eventually came to an end, and I found myself once more at home in Chatham barracks.

But my stay was only a short one, for I was sent off for duty at Port Edgar, in Scotland, where, in addition to my diving work, I had charge of the smithy.

Here much of my work consisted in repairs to

destroyers and all sorts of smaller craft, also attending to the piers, and salving a number of boats, mostly tugs, that had been on the bottom for some time.

The most interesting part of the work here was in connection with torpedo and submarine nets, with which they were experimenting extensively at that time. The nets were duly rigged, and then submarines fitted with cutting-knives on the bows were sent at full speed against them. The nets were of various kinds—wire, chain, etc., and of various types of steel and other metals. It was quite exciting seeing whether the subs. would get through these obstacles or not. Usually they did, but not always.

Frequently the submarines were damaged in these operations, and that, of course, meant plenty of work for me, and in addition I was always kept pretty busy recovering lost anchors, and torpedoes after firing practice.

I then had a considerable spell of diving under the Forth Bridge, by the end of which time I was getting a bit fed up with hard work, and anxious for a change:

This eventually came to me when, after about two years, I was appointed chief diver to H.M.S. *Marlborough*, which meant a greater variety in my work, as well as plenty of foreign service, which just then I was craving for.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### H.M.S. 'MARLBOROUGH'

I WAS over two and a half years in the *Marlborough* and in that time visited all sorts of places, though most of our time was spent at Gibraltar, around the coast of Spain, at Scapa Flow and Invergordon, and so on.

I had a rather weird experience at Scapa Flow, when I went down to recover a lost anchor, for I suddenly found myself in the midst of what I have since described to myself as 'The Dead Fleet'—German destroyers and cruisers that had been sunk there.

It was a strange and impressive sight, for most of them had sunk on an even keel, though some had heeled one way or the other. They also seemed actually to be in some sort of formation.

It was an extraordinary sensation to walk on the ocean bed amongst those ships, with their rusted sides seeming to tower up into infinity itself, and the fish swimming in and out through the open ports high above one's head. I have been in peaceful death-chambers; have seen corpses of those slain in battle lying about me in heaps; have walked in graveyards and cemeteries—but never have I had such an impression of *death* as I got when I was wandering alone (and I think one never feels quite so alone as one does in diving rig at the bottom of the sea) amongst those immobile and rotting, but once

so active, mechanical giants of the surface. I have had nightmare dreams of it many times since then.

I had a very different experience in Almeria Bay, when our launch, passing under a wire hawse, had its ensign, brass pole and all, carried away. Of course the weight of the pole carried it to the bottom, and since ensigns must not be lost in that way, I was sent down to recover it.

I found it without much trouble, with a large and ugly looking crab investigating it rather suspiciously.

I decided I'd give the boys at the top a bit of a surprise, so I signalled for more air, stopped my outlet valve, and bobbed up to the surface with the ensign over my shoulder. I waved it at them as I came to the surface, then released the air, and promptly sank once more, afterwards coming up in the usual way. On account of this little exploit I was known on board as *Britannia* for some time.

At Polenso Bay we took part in some aerial firing-practice, in the course of which one of our propellers was struck by a descending aerial torpedo.

I was immediately sent down to inspect the damage, and found it to be pretty bad. One of the blades of the screw had caught it full and fair, and was badly bent at right angles, making the propeller quite unusable.

I ventured to suggest that the best way out of the trouble was to cut the damaged blade right off with a hacksaw. They rather doubted if I could do it, but I assured them that I could.

So down I went, with the necessary tackle, and a hacksaw, with spare blades in my boots in case of accidents. The snag was that the blade I had in my

saw was the only really good one we had in store at the moment.

A lot depended on my getting this job done successfully, as if not we should have had to put into Devonport dockyard for repairs, and as we belonged to Chatham this would cause quite a lot of complications, and would most certainly upset the week-end leave. So you may guess that the lads were taking a great interest in my progress.

I hitched myself on to the bracket, and got to work, but it wasn't long before I commenced to think I had bitten off a bit more than I could chew.

However, I stuck to it doggedly. Cutting away at tough brass with a hacksaw under water isn't an easy job, and this was a mighty thick piece of brass to get through. I suffered a good deal from cold, and I dared not attempt to hurry for fear of busting my only decent blade—I was afraid the others would be of very little use. I was further hampered by the fact that my vision was obscured by clouds of fine brass-dust floating around me in the water. Hour after hour I stuck it, though once or twice I came near to passing out. But I was on my mettle (both literally and metaphorically), because they had thought I should fall down on the job, and this I was determined not to do.

At last, however, I got through it, and returned to the surface, having been eight and a half hours under water—which I believe to be something like a record.

When I got up I was pretty nearly all in, but I reported to the diving officer: 'work finished.' After that the engineers had to be satisfied that the propeller would revolve. It did, and the job was announced to be a success. I was also able proudly to



exhibit the severed blade, which showed the cut as neat and true as the edge of an axe.

The following day, after church service, all hands were assembled on the quarter-deck, and Captain Fisher publicly congratulated me on the job I had done, while I was heartily cheered by the crew for having thus saved their leave for them. A very satisfactory piece of work, all round.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### ‘DANSE MACABRE . . .’

AS time went on my duties aboard the *Marlborough* became multifarious, until at last I felt that I was one with the gentleman immortalized by the late W. S. Gilbert, who claimed in song that he was ‘the cook and the captain bold, and the mate of the *Nancy* brig, and the midshipmite and the bo’sun tight, and the crew of the captain’s gig!’

For I was, in fact, chief diver, blacksmith, ship’s cobbler and bootmaker, church organist, cornet-player in the band, and social secretary to the ship.

This last was, as a matter of fact, pretty well a whole-time job in itself. For at that time the Admiralty were eager to have the social side of the Navy developed, presumably as a stimulus to recruiting, and all along the coast where we patrolled the *Marlborough’s* dances and concerts were both famous and popular. All the organizing of these fell upon my shoulders, and I don’t think I am exaggerating when I state that at that time I was the busiest man aboard the ship.

I was also greatly in demand on the sports side, and in 1929, at Torquay, I pulled an oar and helped to win the Silver Cock, the prize for the fastest C.P.O.’s galley in the Fleet. This is a much-coveted distinction, and competition for its possession

is very keen. I know it took months of training to get our crew into winning form on this occasion.

Off the coast of Scotland we hit upon a diver's mystery. A lighter had been sunk in shallow water, and a diver was sent down to examine her and report on the damage, in the usual way.

At low tide the bows of the lighter were clear of the water, but they were closed in, and there was no hatchway or other method of getting into her at such time.

The diver went down when the tide was coming in. He went down in prime condition, but remained under for rather longer than the usual period, and towards the end of the time it was noticed that his signals were somewhat vague and erratic.

An explanation of this came when he was finally hauled up, for when they got his helmet off they found him to be gloriously drunk, and reeking to high heaven of whiskey.

The problem was—how the devil could a diver get drunk under water . . . ?

Eventually I was sent down to investigate. I went down when the tide was on the ebb, and soon discovered the key to the mystery. For the lighter lay at an angle, sloping down towards the stern, and when the tide was low the cuddy in the forepart was clear of water and, thanks to a couple of ventilators, full of air. And in the cuddy were reposing several cases of whiskey, one of which had been broached.

The diver, no more than up to his waist in water, and with plenty of air to breath, had simply taken his opportunity, unscrewed his front-glass, and had a good time.

It was somewhere around this period that I had

a hair-raising experience off Gibraltar. There had been some torpedo practice going on, and a torpedo was missing.

I was taken off in the boat to where it was estimated that the missing torpedo might be found, and down I went into some six fathoms of water. It was pretty dark down there, but the water was so clear and the sun overhead so strong that one could dimly distinguish a weird, green sort of world about one.

I commenced to search around for the missing torpedo. I found an old, barnacle-encrusted anchor, a length of chain cable, and the usual old pots, pans, and bits of scrap-iron, but no sign of the torpedo.

Then I came upon what looked like quite a good suit of overalls, lying in a water-logged heap on the ocean bed.

Carelessly, hardly thinking what I was doing, I bent to pick it up and examine it. I took hold of one of the sleeves—and got the shock of my life.

For it instantly moved under my touch. It was just as though there was an arm—a living, human arm—inside that sleeve.

Through my mind there instantaneously flashed all the stories I had ever heard of weird, ghostly manifestations beneath the waves—but in all such stories I could remember nothing like this.

I cannot hope to describe—I do not think even the cleverest pen could—the horrible sensation that went through me at the feeling of life inside that apparently empty sleeve. I dropped it, of course, as though it had been a hot coal, and instinctively stepped back a pace in the slow-motion-picture style of the diver under water, staring meanwhile at the

now moving sleeve with eyes that must have been distended and horrified behind the glass of my helmet.

But there was worse to come . . . !

Before my incredulous gaze that accursed suit of overalls commenced to rear itself on end. It was like some impossibly malformed being rising slowly from the ground, and seeming to undulate, snake-fashion, as it rose.

No head, nor hands nor feet were visible, yet the thing stood up, roughly as though some human form was inside it. Yet it seemed to me that only one leg and one arm of the suit was filled—the others seemed to flap emptily in the slight undercurrent there was just there.

Then it moved again, and now it actually seemed to be dancing in front of me in a sort of horribly grotesque imitation of a ballet-dancer on a stage.

I wish I could describe my sensations, though at the moment I doubt if I was conscious of having any. The eerie, green semi-darkness ; the silence and the sense of isolation from everything human ; plus the fact that in my weighted dress and under that depth of water I could only move very slowly and with difficulty, gave the whole thing the atmosphere of the most terrifying kind of children's nightmare.

But at the moment it mattered little to me whether I was able to move fast or slowly—for just then I couldn't move at all. I was literally paralysed with fear. I could not even scream inside my helmet. I realized afterwards that my mouth must have been idiotically open, and that I had been dribbling inside my helmet. . . .

How long this paralysis of horror lasted I cannot tell, but it cannot have been for longer than a minute or so. This was as well, for I certainly think if it had I should have lost consciousness.

Eventually the dancing terror seemed to move towards me, and in doing so it looked to me as though it bent itself in a fantastic imitation of the performer's bow. And in that instant I felt something wrap itself round my ankle, and give a vicious forward tug . . . !

And then I knew that what I was facing was not some psychic manifestation of the ocean depths, but something far more practical, and probably more physically dangerous. An octopus—and a whopper at that.

Evidently the brute had made a sort of nest inside the suit of overalls, and I had clutched hold of it and disturbed it . . . !

For the moment I was so overcome by the wave of relief that swept over me that I was almost as paralysed and helpless as before. Another great tentacle was reaching out and waving about before my eyes before I became spurred at last to action.

But now I was all right—not by any means out of danger, but at least on my own ground. I had been trained to face this sort of thing, and I knew just what to do and how to do it.

The octopus had my right ankle in its grasp. I dropped on the other knee, sliding my left foot out well behind me to prevent it getting a grip on that also. Then, in a flash, I had out my heavy, copper-hilted knife, and was jabbing viciously at the tentacle that held me.

The thing shuddered and writhed like an angry serpent as the point of my knife found one of the 'eyes,' or suckers, which were dotted along its length. That suit of overalls was suddenly whirled about as though by giant hands, and now there emerged to view the sinister, hooded shape that was my enemy.

I had a momentary vision of the ugly brute, and of what seemed to be a mass of waving tentacles menacing me, and then everything was blotted out into Stygian darkness as the sea-monster squirted the black fluid from his great cheek-bags at me.

I got hold of one of the tentacles, and felt my way up it as one may go hand over hand along a rope, knowing that the nearer one gets to the body of an octopus, the safer one is, for the tentacles are less effective at close range. The tentacle wrapped itself round me, but I jabbed viciously at it and was instantly released. I could feel that the inky water around me was being threshed into a miniature maelstrom by the whirling tentacles.

Then I got a grip on the thing's body, overcoming with an effort the physical nausea produced by the contact. Then, exerting all my strength, I turned it over and stabbed into its body again and again.

For a moment or two it seemed to pull and tug me around, and to shake me as a terrier does a rat—and then its struggles grew weaker, and I was at last able to release myself and slowly move clear of the blackened patch of water around my conquered enemy. I was feeling pretty feeble, and rather sick physically—and I'll swear that if it hadn't been for the woollen cap I wore under my helmet, my hair

would have been standing on end like the bristles of a bass-broom.

But I managed to signal to be hauled up, and once more I found the sunshine and the fresh air that caressed my sweating face when the front glass was removed infinitely welcome and comforting.



## CHAPTER XXX

### THE GHOST-SHIP

AFTER this I was temporarily transferred to a ship, which was, I think, about the queerest job I ever had in the Navy—or, for that matter, the queerest any sailor ever had since the days of the men who manned the old fire-ships during the battle with the Spanish Armada.

The *Agamemnon* was the ship, and she was, when I joined her, lying at Portsmouth, and taking aboard the strangest sort of cargo, consisting of tons and tons of cork plus a certain amount of heavy ballast.

Also she was swarming with electricians, who were fixing up all sorts of queer gadgets. Another curious thing that I noticed was the number of divers she had as part of her crew.

Altogether, from the beginning, she was very much a mystery ship, as far as we, her crew, were concerned.

When we finally put to sea it was under sealed orders, as far as we knew. None of us had been told where we were bound for, and of course all sorts of rumours were rife. But not even the wildest of these came anywhere near the astounding truth.

One thing was evident. The voyage was hardly likely to be a long one, for at best we were not only

a scratch, but also very much a skeleton crew. As escort we had H.M.S. *Snapdragon* and a large, sea-going tug—another queer combination.

Almost as soon as we were well out of sight of land we ran into a fleet of warships, which we afterwards learned consisted of part of the Mediterranean and part of the Atlantic fleets. There were also a number of seaplanes and airplanes circling around overhead.

The next thing that happened was more than ever surprising. The engines stopped, and the ship lay to. And then came the well-known and usually tragic order :

‘All hands prepare to abandon ship !’

The tug drew close. The *Snapdragon* remained a mile or so away. With the slick orderliness of the British Navy at all such times we followed out the order and in a very short time were ready to leave the *Agamemnon*, though we were all completely and literally ‘at sea’ as to what the game was, for the old ship seemed perfectly whole and seaworthy.

Unusual precautions were taken to make sure that no one at all was left aboard the ship. In addition to the roll being called, a specially appointed party searched the ship from stem to stern, before we finally left her and were taken aboard the tug.

That last was the first real clue we got as to what was going to happen, and the word went round :

‘Say good-bye to the old *Agamemnon*. She’s going to be used for target-practice, and sunk !’

But I doubted that, for it did not explain quite a lot of things to me : the ‘hush-hush’ policy that had been followed, and the fact of there being so many divers, blacksmiths, and artificers amongst the

scratch crew, or the cargo of cork, or the elaborate work put in by those electricians. It was, however, partly fact. . . .

We got aboard the tug and, as sailors will, stood staring at the ship we had just left, with all the sadness that sailors invariably feel when they look upon a fine ship doomed to death.

And then happened one of the most amazing things I have ever witnessed. I have been startled—I have had some real, knockdown surprises in my life. But this time I could hardly believe my eyes, and felt that I must be going cracked, or something, until I saw and heard that all my mess-mates were similarly flabbergasted.

We had left the ship without a solitary soul aboard her. In fact every precaution—most unusual and elaborate precautions—had been taken to see that she was completely deserted. To our certain knowledge no one could have boarded her since we had left. . . .

And yet, as we stood and stared, there came smoke from her funnels—a long drawn hooting from her syren. Then a flag ran up to her masthead, and next moment we saw her swing round and come under way, heading for the distant warships of the combined Fleets . . . !

For a few moments I stared utterly dumbfounded at this amazing spectacle. Then I turned to look at my comrades. I have never seen such a collection of goofs as they looked in my life, staring at the phenomenon with open mouths, blanched faces, and eyes that stuck out of their heads like organ-stops.

One fellow, who was a confirmed and notorious boozier, let out a sudden wail of terror :

"Good Lord, what is it, boys? Is it spooks, or have I got the bleatin' horrors . . . !"

And he turned, and made a break for below.

I rubbed my eyes and stared; rubbed and stared again. But there was no doubt about it—there was the old *Agamemnon*, which we knew to be an abandoned and deserted ship, making knots across the water and actually swerving in her course and doing manœuvres, just as though she had a full engine-room and deck crew aboard her.

I'm not going to deny that, in that moment, my thoughts turned to things ghostly, spiritual, and supernatural—though I'm not given in the ordinary way to believing in such things.

I saw a vision of the *Agamemnon*, doomed by the Admiralty to be destroyed by her own sister ships as a mere target, suddenly taken possession of by a ghostly crew of the men who had suffered and died upon her during the War, and manned by her crew of discarnate entities, being taken out to sea in defiance of the fate allotted to her by the powers-that-be, and destined to wander the ocean as did the ship of Vanderdecken—only in this instance a *real* ship manned by a ghostly crew. It was, no doubt, a pretty and romantic conception, but . . . !

And yet the truth, when we came to learn it, was hardly more credible.

For it was a fact that she was steaming boldly along, under perfect control, yet with not a living soul aboard her—the secret being that she was controlled by wireless, operating from her attendant ship, the *Snapdragon* !

This, of course, just as soon as I heard it (the tug's crew seemed to know more about it all than we ourselves did), explained quite a lot to me. True,

I was still lost in wonder at the miracle of modern science, which opened a vista, not entirely pleasing, of how great naval engagements would be fought in the future—all the fleets on both sides controlled by men sitting miles away, in perfect safety, working switches and keyboards . . . not much romance about that, somehow. . . .

Yes, it did away with the 'spooky' feeling, and it explained to me why the cork had been taken aboard, and stacked tight in all her compartments, and what it was that the electricians were monkeying with while we were in harbour, and why we had abandoned the ship like that. It did not, however, explain to me the reason for the large number of blacksmiths, divers, and artificers being amongst the skeleton crew of the target.

But the explanation for that came soon enough.

The *Snapdragon* followed the *Agamemnon* at a respectful distance, and we in the tug followed the *Snapdragon*. And presently the word was passed that certain of the divers were to get into their fire-fighting kit, with smoke-helmets ready. I was one of these.

A little later we saw the ships of the Fleet open fire on the poor old *Agamemnon*, battering her to blazes. Later, aeroplanes and seaplanes circling above dropped bombs on her. Meanwhile we stood by, ready in case she caught fire. . . .

She didn't, but after a while the firing ceased, and the old ship, her engines still working perfectly, and still under complete control of the wireless, turned round and came back to meet us, finally stopping her engines and lying to within a mile or so.

It was a weird and uncanny sight, and I don't

mind admitting that there was a 'creepy' feeling about going aboard her again.

But go aboard we had to, and then we had to work like galley-slaves—blacksmiths and artificers on the deck and superstructure, and divers in the hold and outside below the water-line—patching up the damage that the guns had done to her that day. And there was plenty of it, you may believe me.

And this went on for about three weeks, in all weathers. In fact, the rougher the weather, the better pleased were those responsible for the experiment.

But we weren't !

We soon got over the creepy feeling, and took this latest marvel of modern science as a matter of course. But the deadly monotony, as well as the hardness of the work was enough to make one cry. To be continually working, patching and repairing, knowing all the time that the following day the damage would all be done over again—well, it was singularly irritating and demoralizing. I should imagine it was rather like the torture of the old-fashioned punishment of 'shot-drill,' when men were set to picking up heavy shot from a pile on one side of a yard, piling it up neatly on the other side, and then bringing it all back to its original spot again. Just useless labour, undone as soon as it was done. Although, of course, one has to admit that in this particular case it wasn't exactly wasted labour since it gave the other ships and their gunners the necessary practice—and better practice than ever before, since the target was a moving one, and able to manœuvre for advantageous positions, and so on.

But it was certainly all very tiring, and very trying to the nerves.

However, all things come to an end sooner or later, and after about three weeks of this job, I found myself, much to my relief, sent back to my own ship once more.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### ANCHORED AT LAST

IN 1930, after two years and six months of hard work with the Atlantic Fleet, H.M.S. *Marlborough* was paid off, and I was transferred back to the Naval Barracks at Chatham—where, twenty years before, I had started my career as a sailor—to serve the last two years prior to being discharged on pension. Thus, as usual in life, the wheel turned its full circle.

After the eventful life I had been leading for so many years, I found barrack routine pretty dull and monotonous. I did little jobs in the smithy, and occasionally ‘had my dip’ (as we divers put it), but nothing of any note occurred.

After some time an old captain of mine came to take over command of the Barracks, and he asked me how I was getting along. I told him frankly that I found it dull, and was pretty well fed up.

As a result of this he put me in charge of the C.P.O.s’ Mess, which kept me too busy feeding other men up with food to get fed up myself by events—or lack of them.

It was a man-size job, entailing the catering for and issuing of food to no less than three hundred chief petty officers at the rate of four meals per day,



with a staff of only forty messmen to do all the work.

This kept me going all out for the next two years until, in April 1932, I slung my hammock for the last time, and the following day took my discharge.

It was a queer feeling to be out in the world once more, wearing a suit of civvy clothes that somehow didn't seem to fit properly. I felt rather like a prodigal son who had just been thrown out from the shelter and protection of his home, and the world outside the Navy seemed somehow to be cold, uncharitable, and even a little threatening.

As a matter of fact it is something of an undertaking, and certainly a very considerable change, for a man who has been for twenty-two years in one of the Services, where beyond his official duties he has had no responsibilities—I mean, in particular, in regard to such things as food, clothing, rent, etc.—to come out into the world again as an ordinary citizen. Particularly when, as in my case, he has to take up all the responsibilities of a married man.

I have not mentioned it before, since it had no direct bearing on my naval experiences, but in 1913 I married a Miss Agnes Hume, and we had two children, both girls, one of whom has unfortunately died since.

So it was necessary that something should be done to augment my naval pension, and for a long time I was looking around for a suitable job. It did not prove as easy as I imagined it would, but eventually I found a berth for my wife and myself as steward and stewardess of a club in Gillingham.

This, however, didn't seem to be likely to get us

anywhere much, and so I kept my eyes open for something better.

I had a chat with an old officer of mine about it, and he remarked :

“I don’t know why it is, but with retired naval men I find that from the rank of captain upwards they almost always go into the country and finish up as farmers or squires, while the lower ratings generally become publicans, somewhere or other.”

The idea grew on me. After the life of the ship and the mess-room, one grows to need company and cheerfulness, and a pub seemed to offer that. In addition it seemed to me—and still does, for that matter—that a man can end his days a lot less usefully than by dispensing good beer to good fellows. Also one has a chance of expressing one’s personality in a pub, and after all, the publican in his own house is not unlike the captain in his ship. . . .

And so, eventually, I have become captain of my own ship. Her name is the ‘Palmerston,’ and she is berthed in Well Street, Hackney—near enough to the docks for some of my old sea-going pals to find me out occasionally, and to have a glass of beer and spin a yarn or two.

I flatter myself that I have made the place something more than a mere pub—it is something of a social centre as well. We have our concerts and our whist-drives, and the South Hackney and Central Branch of the British Legion have made their headquarters here. I do not find life slow. I have plenty of interests, and plenty of work to do, and I even occasionally gain a new experience, as when, in November of last year, I carried a Legion banner in the procession of the Lord Mayor’s Show,

And if anybody had told me, even two years ago, that I should one day take even the humblest part in that fine old civic ceremony, how I should have laughed.

Which only shows you that one never knows . . . !

## CHAPTER XXXII

### AFTERTHOUGHTS

IT has, of course, also been a new experience for me to write a book. But I have enjoyed every moment of it. I suppose all we veterans take a delight in 'fighting our battles o'er again,' and to a man who, like myself, has few unhappy memories to sadden the journey, such incursions into the dim and distant past are a great pleasure.

I have been told that many men who sit down to write their life-stories find some difficulty in getting enough material to fill the requisite number of pages. This has certainly not been my trouble. I could, for instance, have filled at least half as much space again were it not for the many shoals and snags represented by the law of libel, and so on. And even now that I have finished my life-story, I am plagued by the cropping up in my mind of incidents which, at the time, I forgot to put in. They come in flashes when I am sitting by the fire, after the pub has emptied ; or some old messmate strolls in and says :

"I say, Harry, do you remember . . . !"

And I do—then.

Or sometimes I wake up in the night, and old scenes and incidents come flickering across my brain like the pictures on a cinema-screen. . . .

For instance, when we landed at Gallipoli, and my curiosity was attracted by a number of curious-

looking objects sticking up, in a row, from the ground. They looked rather like some sort of a crop of growing things that had been destroyed by fire.

Curiously, I went over and examined them closely. And afterwards, how I wished I hadn't . . . !

What I had taken for 'a crop of growing things' had once been British soldiers. They had been tied to stakes and petrol or some other inflammable liquid had been poured over them. Then they had been set light to, and burned from the head downwards! In most cases their boots and puttees remained—charred, but not destroyed.

And off Smyrna, when we were under a heavy fire of lyddite shells. I happened to be looking towards the galley, and the cook had his head out, and, grinning all over his face, was cracking some joke or other, when there came a sudden flash and bang—and lo, only one wall of the galley remained, and on that all that was left of the cook was plastered, like a squashed fly. . . .

Or—examining a barge-load of corpses, during the Townsend affair. They came drifting down the river, and there was hardly a gunshot wound amongst the lot of them. They had all died of thirst.

A good wise-crack by Admiral Tyrwhitt one day when we had brought down a Zep. from the clouds in the morning, and towards evening blew up a submarine with a depth-charge.

"That's what you might call burning the candle at both ends!" observed the Admiral, drily.

I suppose I could go on like this indefinitely, but time and space forbid. However, it's always best to end everything on a laugh, if possible, and

the following incident, of which I was reminded by an old messmate only yesterday, might produce it :

It was towards the end of the War, and the Fleet was lying off Felixstowe, taking in stores. I was one of two divers aboard the flagship.

While our stores were coming aboard, a fine side of beef was accidentally dropped into the sea, and the Admiral decided that, during a period of national economy, waste of that kind could not be permitted. A diver must go down and recover it.

Now, on routine work, we used to dive in turn, and it was the turn of my mate, a chap whose name was Mickey, to go down on this occasion. But Mickey had ideas.

As I think I have explained elsewhere, divers in the Navy get extra pay while they are actually down. So says Mickey to me :

" See here, old-timer, we may as well make the most of this. When I come up I shall report that I can't find it—whether I can or not. That means they'll send you down afterwards, and you can find it when you go down. In fact, if I *do* find it first, I'll 'place' it for you."

I agreed to this nefarious scheme, and Mickey duly went down. He was under for an hour or so, and then came up and reported no luck. But the wink he gave me told me that he had, in fact, found it all right, and had doubtless 'placed' it for me.

But before I was ready to go down we piped to dinner. And just as dinner finished there came one of those sudden orders through on the 'phone from the Admiralty—the Fleet to put to sea immediately !

On the Admiral's orders we flew the signal, and

then all the Fleet got busy. It was up anchor and away, and smartly does it.

Smartly it was, and the flagship to show the best example, of course. All hands at their stations, and the anchors coming up. . . .

Somewhere about that moment I caught a glimpse of Mickey's face. He looked as though he'd eaten something that hadn't quite agreed with him. I didn't attach any significance to it at the time, but it wasn't long before I quite saw the point.

For as our bow-anchor came up a queer sound smote on our ears. The Fleet, and the people ashore, were all uniting in one big, huge laugh!

And soon after that we saw the reason.

For, as our bow-anchor came slowly into view, it revealed, neatly lashed to its shank—that missing side of beef . . . !

Of course, poor old Mickey had put it there, thinking it would be an easy place for me to 'find' it—as it certainly would have been had I had the opportunity of going down for it.

As to what the Admiral, who knew the ropes, had to say about it later—well, that's nobody's business.

But it's all in the life of a diver !

